

# Princeton Theological Review

Vol. 18, No. 1

*Church for the World:  
Essays in Honor of the  
Retirement of  
Darrell L. Guder*

Featuring essays by  
Nathan C. Johnson  
Michael David Key  
Luke Zerra  
Deanne Ferree Womack

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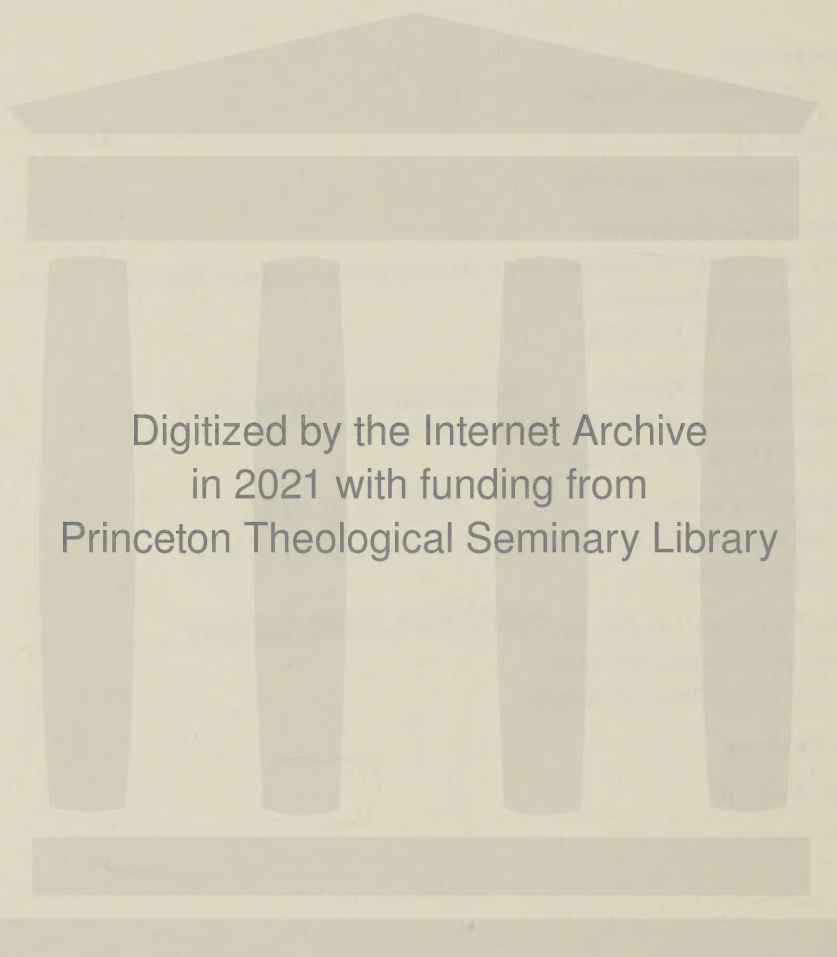
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

# Princeton Theological Review

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# Prolegomena

CATHERINE C. TOBEY

*Executive Editor, Princeton Theological Review*

Who am I to be a witness? Who are you? How can we even dream of being heard when addressing this wide world overcome by complexities, needs, doubts, and suffering? For Karl Barth, the answer is simple. He writes, "The point is, in general terms, that only on the lips of a man who is himself affected, seized and committed, controlled and nourished, unsettled and settled, comforted and alarmed by it, can the intrinsically true witness of the act and revelation of God in Jesus Christ have the ring and authority of truth which applies to other [humans]" (*Church Dogmatics* IV/3.2, 657). Darrell Guder is such a person, one whose witness is made indelibly clear as Christ's compassion and conviction simultaneously shine through him.

As he retires from his post as the Henry Winters Luce Professor of Missional and Ecumenical Theology at Princeton Theological Seminary, it is the great privilege of the editors at the *Princeton Theological Review* to present this issue in his honor. Darrell Guder has blessed the academy, Church, and para-church organizations throughout his ministry, focusing on what it means for the Church to be missional, especially in this post-Christendom world. In each of these endeavors, he has offered insight into the God who is for us, calling all who will hear to recognize who they are to be for God: witnesses.

This issue of the *Princeton Theological Review* seeks to continue on this trajectory, considering its practical, biblical, philosophical, and theological implications. First, it is our pleasure to welcome Ben Conner, associate professor of Christian Discipleship at Western Theological Seminary, to describe Darrell Guder's great influence on him. In his comical and affectionate reflection, he leaves the reader to wonder about the countless others who have been blessed by Dr. Guder.

In the first article, Nathan C. Johnson, a Ph.D. candidate at Princeton Theological Seminary, describes the missionary nature of the New Testament in a theologically rich text analysis. By drawing together the stories of the Mission of the Seventy and Pentecost, as well as the Table of Nations, Johnson enables readers to recognize the missionary nature of God and the all-encompassing call to participation within it.

In the next two articles, MDiv students, Michael David Key and Luke Zerra explore how the Church ought to exist in the world. First, Key considers the nature of the Church as organism and institution through the lens of Herman Bavinck's ecclesiology. As the Church understands its call to witness against the world and influence the world in this post-modern context, Key presents it as an agent of hope and calls readers to return to unity through a focus on Christ. Next, Zerra looks to G.W.F. Hegel's eucharistic references in *Phenomenology of Spirit* and how they relate to his conception

of the presence of the Holy Spirit. In so doing, Zerra encourages the Church to consider the relationship between the Eucharist and its mission, bringing philosophy and practice together in an excellent example of how the Spirit meets the Church in social justice.

Deanna Ferree Womack, a Ph.D. candidate in Mission, Ecumenics, & History of Religions, is the last doctoral student to have Darrell Guder on a dissertation committee. In this final article, Womack encourages the Church to open its eyes to the different ways that Christians around the globe understand God. By focusing on Lesslie Newbigin's thought and describing its various Indian influences and reception by Indian Christians, she helps readers understand the importance of considering the relationship between theology and culture.

Altogether, the articles in this issue of the *Princeton Theological Review* reflect the varied ways in which the Church is called to the missionary landscape of this world; they would not have been possible without the scholarship, passion, and dedication of Darrell Guder. May God open our minds and hearts as we join together as a community of readers to witness to Jesus Christ, the head of the Church.

March 18, 2015  
Princeton, NJ



# Darrell L. Guder

BENJAMIN T. CONNER

*Assoc. Professor of Christian Discipleship, Western Theological Seminary*

An e-mail from Darrell Guder is like a hand written letter. One can sense the time and care invested in the correspondence. Even when he signs a book, he includes phrases like, "With the prayer that God will continue to guide your discernment of his will for you" (inside *The Incarnation and the Church's Witness* on the occasion of my visit to Princeton Theological Seminary, which I will describe below) and "with delight in the prospect of working together in the years ahead" (inside his translation of *The Great Passion*, which I received upon matriculating). Indeed, hospitality, accessibility, and pastoral sensitivity have characterized Darrell's teaching ministry as much as has his rigorous work ethic, publication record, and memorable lectures.

Having been stirred in my imagination by his work with the Gospel and Our Culture Network and moved by my reading of *Missional Church* and *The Continuing Conversion of the Church*, I had no questions about where I wanted to pursue doctoral work or with whom I wished to study. A mutual friend, who considered Darrell a mentor and a father figure, wrote a letter of introduction on my behalf to Darrell, and I received a warm and lengthy reply that included this encouraging phrase:

"I'd be delighted to get to know you, probably by e-mail first, but perhaps in a visit to our campus before long."

Darrell's missiological analysis of the disintegration of Christendom in the West, his challenge to reductionistic views of evangelism, his call to the church to "walk worthily," and his appropriation and interpretation of Karl Barth as a missional theologian are what I found so appealing about his theological project. Moreover, he seemed to be challenging the entire *telos* of theological education. So, after months of correspondence, I took up his invitation to visit Princeton Theological Seminary. I knew I was interested in working with Darrell, but I had no idea that I was showing up for my interview as a doctoral candidate. So unsuspecting was I that I was surprised to see that some kind person had prepared an itinerary for me.

Needless to say, I was enthusiastic about the prospect of working with the man who had mentored me from afar and who was on the forefront of following Lesslie Newbigin's lead in fostering a missionary encounter between the North American church and western culture. I arrived in town a day early in order to get my bearings and to visit friends. Though I didn't have a meeting with Dr. Guder until the following day, I thought I would stop past his office to let him know I was in town and to communicate my excitement about meeting with him. As I approached the door to his Hodge Hall office I heard murmurings in a strange tongue, and soon after I rapt on the

door to announce my arrival I was met with a man who was merely physically present. I later learned he had been translating a text out of German into English and was “in the zone” you could say. Feeling like I had intruded on a sacred encounter, I decided to run fully into the awkwardness I had created:

“Dr. Guder, I’m Ben Conner and I’m excited to meet with you tomorrow...”

“Yes. Ben Conner. We don’t meet today.”

“I was ju...”

“We meet tomorrow. We meet tomorrow for lunch.”

“Right. We m...”

“Yes, in Mackay. At twelve...”

“I...”

“No, 1:15. 1:15 in MacKay.”

“Right, we meet tomorrow in Mackay at 1:15”

“Well [pause] I will look forward to seeing you then.”

He gently but firmly closed the door and I heard the muffled sound of hard consonants beyond it. Guder’s gracious hospitality was equaled only by his intensity as a scholar. In the years that followed, I would feel both the demands and the support of working with Darrell.

Despite an unconventional dissertation topic, Darrell was very encouraging charging me to prove my competency and refine my scholarship in fields beyond missiology. By unconventional I mean that my dissertation written in the History department (Mission, Ecumenics, and History of Religion) took up an issue from Practical Theology (the contemporary practices discussion) and engaged it with a theological tool (missional theology) all while considering the implications of such a study for the concrete life experiences of adolescents with intellectual and developmental disabilities. When, not surprisingly, we couldn’t secure enough interest within our department to pull together a committee, and were dissuaded from poaching Kenda Dean from Practical Theology, we went beyond the walls of the seminary to find an outside reader. That reader was George Hunsberger, Darrell’s partner in the missional church conversation and one whose thorough reading of my drafts produced comments that equaled or exceeded the word count of my submission. Darrell is always trying to connect people whom he believes will sharpen one another in an effort to stimulate and expand the crosscurrent of conversation about missional theology. In this case, the relationship he fostered between me and George likely contributed to me securing my current position at Western Theological Seminary.

I know I wasn’t alone in feeling his support. He welcomed his other doctoral students into his life and incorporated our concerns into his work, he labored tirelessly to support us in our research and to help us find a place to develop as scholars upon graduation. Darrell still sends me e-mails championing the latest efforts of John Flett (’08) as a proud father boasts about the accomplishments of a beloved child.

#### REACHING BACKWARD AND LOOKING FORWARD

The project that Darrell invited me to join was the continued development and expansion of his polemical version of “missional theology”—which despite the neologism is not in Guder’s estimation a new concept. In fact, at PTS, Guder



understands himself to be standing in a tradition and carrying on a work that has been underway since the thirties:

I am compelled by the desire to be a good steward of the already well developed and provocative process of missional theology that has coalesced in the last seven decades.<sup>1</sup>

While much can be said, and likely will be said in the pages of this journal, about the relationship between missional theology and the theology of Lesslie Newbigin, Karl Barth, and Karl Hartenstein, among others, Darrell has connected himself very deliberately to the seminary's tradition of ecumenics and build directly upon his interpretation of John Mackay as a progenitor of missional theology.

Guder notes that Mackay was early to acknowledge the end of Christendom and to recognize the formerly "Christian lands" as a new frontier for mission. Mackay recognized that the churches that have become unsettled and dislodged from positions of privilege will need new congregational structures and a more robust accompanying theology in order to be faithful and effective, not unlike the early days of Christianity. "Christian theology today has a missionary role to fulfill of a kind that has not been required since the early Christian thinkers outthought the pagan world," explained Mackay. "Time was when both thought and action in secular society were basically determined by Christian conceptions... But when things, taken for granted for centuries, are called in question, and total disintegration threatens, and secular theologies emerge, Christian theology is invested with a new missionary role."<sup>2</sup> Guder agrees with Mackay that with the deterioration of Christendom, the whole of ecclesiology has been called into question. His missional theology is a polemical kind of ecclesiology that calls the church to acknowledge the trajectory of her election. As Mackay would explain later, "the Church must be made to realize that unless it is missionary it is simply not the Church... The Church is the Church only when it is the missionary instrument of God's will."<sup>3</sup>

Given the new status of the church, the role of the church's theology is to help Christians to walk worthily, as Guder would later phrase it or to "nurture the fitness of their witness" as I have suggested, building on Guder's work. Ecclesiology must be reoriented toward shaping and preparing the people of God for their vocation. In Guder's missional theology we hear echoes of Mackay's evaluation, "The Church's structure and doctrine, her liturgy and even her sacraments, fulfill their highest function, and express their deepest meaning, when they prepare the people of God to be the servants of God."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Darrell L. Guder, "From Mission and Theology to Missional Theology," 49.

<sup>2</sup> John Alexander Mackay, *A Preface to Christian Theology*, The James Sprunt Lectures, 1940 (London: Nisbet & Co., 1942), 65.

<sup>3</sup> John Alexander Mackay, "With Christ to the Frontier," in *Renewal and Advance; Christian Witness in a Revolutionary World*, ed. Charles W. Ranson and International Missionary Council (London: Edinburgh House Press, 1948), 95.

<sup>4</sup> John Alexander Mackay, "The Christian Mission at this Hour," in *The Ghana Assembly of the International Missionary Council, 28th December, 1957 to 8th January, 1958; Selected papers, with an essay on the role of the I.M.C.*, ed. International Missionary Council and Ronald Kenneth Orchard (London: Edinburgh House Press, 1958), 121.

Guder's work picks up on Mackay's impulses and reorients them around a stronger Trinitarian theology of mission. As I have written elsewhere, "Guder's missional theology may be characterized as a polemical theology, grounded in the rediscovery of the missionary nature of the triune God, that explores in every aspect of the theological curriculum and in the discipleship of the church, the implication of the widely affirmed consensus that the church is missionary by its very nature."<sup>5</sup> Even in his retirement, Darrell continues to consider the implications of his inaugural address as Professor of Missional and Ecumenical Theology—he continues to reflect on the ongoing impact that the emerging ecumenical consensus that the church is missionary by her very nature has for theological education and church practice.<sup>6</sup>

I am pleased to take Darrell's insights and interests into conversations that he may never have encountered or anticipated. I certainly owe my tendency to integrate missiological insights into every discipline I touch to Darrell. As a professor of discipleship I pivot on missional theology as a way of speaking about discipleship as participation in God's ongoing redemptive work in the world. Guder's recitation of Newbigin's famous phrase from the IMC conference at Willingen(1952) often comes to mind: "there is no participation in Christ without participation in his mission in the world."<sup>7</sup> *Practicing Witness: A Missional Vision of Christian Practices* represents my attempt to put missional theology in conversation with practical theology's Christian practices conversation. *Amplifying Our Witness* joins youth ministry, missiology, and disability studies in order to reconsider who is the active agent in our witness—what intellectual capacities or social skills are required for us to be able to bear the witness of the Spirit? My current project, *Enabling Witness* explores more deeply the potential connections between missiology and disability studies. All of these works are, to one degree or another, an expansion of Guder's seminal *Be My Witnesses: The Church's Mission, Message, and Messengers* and represent the continuing impact of his life and scholarship and are a reflection of our time spent together.

<sup>5</sup> Benjamin T. Conner. *Practicing Witness: A Missional Vision of Christian Practices*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2011, 18.

<sup>6</sup> Darrell L. Guder, "From Mission and Theology to Missional Theology," *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 24, no. 1 (2003): 47.

<sup>7</sup> Norman Goodall, *Missions under the Cross: Addresses delivered at the enlarged meeting of the Committee of the International Missionary Council at Willingen, in Germany, 1952; with statements issued by the meeting* (London: Edinburgh House Press, 1953), 190.



# **"Sent into All the World"**

## **Luke's sending of the seventy(-two): intertextuality, reception history, and missional hermeneutics**

NATHAN C. JOHNSON  
*Princeton Theological Seminary*

*This paper explores the interrelation between New Testament studies and Missional Theology through a critical reading of Luke 10:1. I approach the text from three different yet complementary angles: (1) a narrative reading of the text, attending to its environs in Luke-Acts; (2) an evaluation of the numbers seventy and seventy-two in antiquity; (3) the reception history of Luke 10:1 with an eye toward its intertextual relation to the Table of Nations. Following this multi-perspectival approach, I synthesize the results in a set of four suggestions for the continuing mission of the Church. If missiologist David Bosch's contention is correct—that the New Testament is fundamentally a missionary document—we should be able to see the text's missional impact in its reception history, and a missionally-oriented meaning should naturally surface from a careful reading of the text.*

Missional theology has long worked in tandem with New Testament studies. The symbiosis springs from a core conviction that mission is "the mother of theology,"<sup>1</sup> that "one of the main reasons for the existence of this body of literature [the New Testament] is the missionary self-understanding and involvement of the people who gave birth to it."<sup>2</sup> The New Testament grows from the soil of missions. Reciprocally, the Church's missional identity sprouts from Scripture. While the Church is in no position to re-write the New Testament, our understanding of Scripture continues to be shaped by new readings, new questions, and new challenges. David Bosch puts it well:

Uncovering the "biblical foundations of mission" is...not a relay race in which the biblical scholar, after having identified the "original meaning" of the text, hands over the "baton" to the missiologist who now has to "apply" it. What is necessary, rather, is for biblical scholars and

<sup>1</sup> "Die älteste mission wurde zur mutter der theologie" (Martin Kähler, *Schriften zu Christologie und Mission* [Munich: Christian Kaiser, 1971], 190).

<sup>2</sup> David Bosch, "Reflections on Biblical Models of Mission," in *Landmark Essays in Mission and World Christianity* (ed. R. L. Gallagher and Paul Hertig; Maryknoll: Orbis, 2009), 3-16 (5). See too James Brownson, *Speaking the Truth in Love: New Testament Resources for a Missional Hermeneutic* (Christian Mission and Modern Culture; Harrisburg: Trinity, 1998), 2.

missiologists to reflect *together* on this matter... We shall, after all, never reach the point where we will have established once and for all the "biblical foundations for mission."<sup>3</sup>

Central to this endeavor is the belief that the Spirit yields fresh and faithful readings of Scripture. In the following, I will be examining Luke 10:1 and its relationship to the Table of Nations (Genesis 10) and the Pentecost narrative. I approach the text from several different but complementary angles. First, I give an internal and narratological reading. Then, I briefly examine the import of the numbers seventy and seventy-two in antiquity. Next, I delve into the text's rich reception history. With this multi-perspectival approach, I aim to synthesize my results in a set of four suggestions for the continuing mission of the Church. If Bosch's presumption is correct—that the New Testament is a missionary document *in se*—we should be able to see the text's missional impact in its reception history, and a missionally-oriented meaning should naturally surface from a careful reading of the text.

### I. NARRATIVE CONTEXT

*But after these things the Lord appointed seventy(-two)<sup>4</sup> others and sent them two by two before him, into every city and place where he himself was about to go.<sup>5</sup>*

Luke situates our pericope, the sending of the seventy(-two), beside several important narratives. The first is a story of insiders (Luke 9:51-56). Just preceding the mission, Luke narrates the xenophobic failure of the James and John, who ask Jesus if they should call down fire on the inhospitable Samaritans. The second is a story of outsiders (Luke 9:57-62). Three different would-be disciples come close to following Jesus, but ultimately other concerns—all related to family and place—forestall them. Luke places the pericope of the would-be disciples after the failure of James and John.<sup>6</sup> The redactional decision is shrewd. As in a diptych, Luke juxtaposes the moral failure of James and John with the hesitancy of the would-be disciples, demonstrating that both insiders and outsiders get it wrong. Ultimately, what matters is following Jesus in discipleship. Through the failure of two of the twelve and the would-be disciples, Luke primes his audience to wonder if another failure is on the horizon with the appointment of the seventy(-two).

<sup>3</sup> Bosch, "Reflections on Biblical Models of Mission," 6. From the perspective of biblical studies, see Brownson: "I hope to be suggestive in opening up a new kind of dialogue between missiology and New Testament interpretation that sparks creative perspectives and fresh avenues of exploration" (*Speaking the Truth in Love*, 2).

<sup>4</sup> The text critical question that has long occupied exegesis of this passage is, "Were seventy or seventy-two sent?" However, I will provisionally bypass this question, which is still at an impasse. See Bruce Metzger, "Seventy or Seventy-two?" *NTS* 5 (1959), 299-306. and, more recently, Joseph Verheyden, "How Many Were Sent According to Lk 10,1?" in *Luke and His Readers: Festschrift A. Denaux* (R. Bieringer et al. eds.; BETL 182; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2005), 193-238 (215). Further, many ancient authors used the two numbers interchangeably. Thus Epiphanius knows that there are seventy-two translators of the LXX, but notes that "for the sake of conciseness we usually speak of the 'Seventy' translation," (*De Fide* 4.5 [GCS 37], 500). Cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 12.56-57, 86 and comments on Josephus in Hugo Grotius, *Annotationes in libros Evangeliorum* (Amsterdam: Joannis Blaeu, 1697), 2:712. I will therefore use "seventy(-two)" rather than seventy or seventy-two.

<sup>5</sup> All translations are my own unless indicated otherwise.

<sup>6</sup> Luke 10:57-62. On the implications for discipleship of Matthew's placement of the pericope, see Günther Bornkamm, "The Stilling of the Storm in Matthew," in *Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew* (trans. Percy Scott; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963), 52-57.



The content of the mission of the seventy(-two) also draws the reader back to earlier portions of Luke's story, specifically the mission of the twelve. Many of the elements are clearly intended to give the reader a sense of *déjà lu*:

Luke 9:1	The twelve are given power and authority over the demons and to cure diseases	Luke 10:19	The seventy(-two) are given authority and power the demons submit to them they cure the sick
9:2	They are sent to preach the reign of God	10:17	
		10:9	
		10:9, 11	They are sent to preach the reign of God

The parallels between the sending of the twelve and the mission of the seventy(-two) are clear.<sup>7</sup> Less conspicuous, however, is the way in which *imitatio Christi* runs through both the sending of the twelve and seventy(-two). Many of the above parallels have their origin in Jesus' own action:

Jesus is the first in the narrative  
to cure (6:18),  
to exorcise demons (6:19)  
with power (6:19b),  
and to proclaim of the reign of God (4:43; etc.<sup>8</sup>).

Indeed, even Jesus himself acts as one who is "sent" by another (Luke 9:48; 10:16). Thus the missionary identity of the twelve and the seventy(-two) is rooted in Jesus' own missionary identity. The disciples become as Jesus in mission: "the one listening to you listens to me; the one rejecting you rejects me, and the one rejecting me rejects the one who sent me" (Luke 10:16). Or, to rephrase it in Johannine terms, "As the Father has sent me, so I send you" (John 20:21).

So the missionary identity of the groups that go out in authority to heal, exorcise, and proclaim the reign of God is grounded in Jesus' own identity as one who is sent to do the same. Yet one could ask: why is the second episode, the sending of the seventy(-two), included in Luke's narrative at all? The episode is absent from the other Synoptic Gospels. Further, it is Matthew, not Luke, who has a penchant for repeating pericopes.<sup>9</sup> The material seems oddly out of place for Luke. However, I suggest that the key to understanding its presence lies in the number of those sent.

## II. SEVENTY AND SEVENTY-TWO

Why seventy or seventy-two? The number, like so many others integers in Judaism and Christianity, is fraught with meaning.

In the Hebrew text of the Table of Nations in Genesis 10, the narrator lists seventy different people groups who populate the postdiluvian earth. The writer concludes, "These are the families of Noah's sons, according to their generations, in their nations.

<sup>7</sup> There are more: they are not to take a bag (9:3 | 10:9); they are to remain in a house (9:4 | 10:7); and shake the dust from their feet in witness against those who do not receive them (9:5 | 10:10-11).

<sup>8</sup> Luke 5:15; 6:20; 8:2.

<sup>9</sup> For more on Matthean doublets, see Ernst von Dobschütz, "Matthew as Rabbi and Catechist," in *The Interpretation of Matthew* (IRT 3; ed. Graham Stanton; trans. Robert Morgan; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 19-28. First published in ZNW 27 (1928): 338-48.

From these the nations branched out over the earth after the flood" (Gen 10:32). Thus seventy begins to take on a universal, global meaning. In later texts, seventy became metonymic for the totality of earth's inhabitants.<sup>10</sup> The number could even have a representative quality. In Rabbinic texts, the number of bulls sacrificed during the festival of Succoth represented the "seventy nations" for whom the Israelites helped "make atonement."<sup>11</sup>

Significantly, the Greek and Latin texts of the Table of Nations most often enumerate, not seventy nations, but seventy-two.<sup>12</sup> The aforementioned text critical problem in Luke 10:1—whether seventy or seventy-two were sent—is mirrored by the same text critical quandary in Genesis 10. Manuscripts of Luke 10:1 oscillate between seventy and seventy-two at precisely the same point as manuscripts of the Table of Nations. Thus the variant in Luke may be an indicator that scribes thought of the connection between the texts *and altered the number according to their conception of how many nations the earth contained*.<sup>13</sup> If this is so, these scribes would be our earliest evidence that Luke 10:1 was read in connection with the Table of Nations. "From a very early point," notes Mikael Parsons, "readers (the scribes) connected the mission of the seventy(-two) with the Table of Nations in Genesis 10 to symbolize the universality of their mission."<sup>14</sup> Therefore, each disciple was appointed to represent a nation of the earth—the reign of God was to be good news for all.

This reading is further confirmed by another related connotation of seventy: the number of languages on the earth. Since each portion of the Table of Nations ends with "these are the descendants of \_\_\_\_\_, by their families and by their *languages*" (Gen 10:5, 20, 31), it was natural to link the number of nations and languages. If there were no variant numbering for the numbering of languages, preference would go to reading Luke 10:1 exclusively in light of the number of nations. However, the enumeration of the number of languages is just as varied as the number of nations: most Jewish sources count seventy,<sup>15</sup> and most Christian sources again count seventy-two.<sup>16</sup> Seventy(-two)

<sup>10</sup> The earliest extant text being *Jub.* 44:34: "they were set among the seventy nations." Pace Tristan Major, "The Number Seventy-two: Biblical and Hellenistic Beginnings to the Early Middle Ages," *Sacris Erudiri* 52 (2013), 7-46 (21). See also 3 *En.* 2:3; 17:6, 8.

<sup>11</sup> *Num. Rab.* 21; *b. Sukkah* 55b *b. Suk.* 55b in *The Babylonian Talmud* (I. Epstein, ed.; London: Soncino Press, 1948), 3:269. Cf. *Pesikta de-Rab Kahana* 28:9 (trans. William Braude; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2002), 592.

<sup>12</sup> Hippolytus, *Haer.* 10:26; Cyril of Jerusalem, *Stromata*, 1.21; Augustine, *Civ.* 16.11-12.

<sup>13</sup> The number of modern commentators who link Luke 10:1 to the Table of Nations is immense. A few may be named: F. Godet, *L'Evangile de Saint Luc* (Neuchâtel: James Attinger, 1874), 2:21; Alfred Loisy, *L'Evangile Selon Luc* (Paris: Minerva, 1924), 290-91; Joseph Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke X-XXIV* (ABC 28a; New York: Doubleday, 1985), 846; Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 412; John Nolland, *Luke 9:21-18:34* (WBC 35b; Dallas: Word Books, 1993), 2:412; François Bovon, *Luke: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 9:51-19:27* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013), 26. Premodern commentaries will be explored at greater length below.

<sup>14</sup> Mikael Parsons, "The Place of Jerusalem on the Lukan Landscape," in *Literary Studies in Luke-Acts: Essays in Honor of Joseph B. Tyson* (ed. R. P. Thompson and T. E. Phillips; Macon: Mercer University Press, 1998), 155-172 (163). One notes that the LXX actually contains seventy-three names, though it is popularly read to have seventy-two from an early date. See Augustine's clever resolution of the problem in *Civ.* 16.11-12.

<sup>15</sup> Seventy languages: *m. Sot.* 7:5; *m. Shek.* 5:1; 3 *En.* 48D:3; *Num. Rab.* 14:5; *Midr. Ps.* 68.6 (to Ps 68:12).



did not only symbolize nations and languages.<sup>17</sup> For our purposes, we are not interested in the full range of meanings of seventy(-two), but how the number is read in Luke 10. For that, we turn to the text's rich reception history.

### III. RECEPTION HISTORY OF LUKE 10:1

Do early interpreters read the numbers seventy and/or seventy-two in Luke 10:1 with the Table of Nations in mind? And if so, do they see a universalizing tendency in the text?

Cyril of Alexandria does, commenting that Christ is sending heralds "so that the message of salvation would take possession of the *whole* world."<sup>18</sup> Similarly, the author of the Pseudo-Clementine *Recognitions* notes that Christ appoints seventy-two "so that the preaching...of the blessed kingdom of God is sent into *all* the world."<sup>19</sup>

Later, Bede reckoned the number of nations to be seventy-two, further noting that "among them [i.e., these nations] the Lord sent seventy-two disciples."<sup>20</sup> Cornelius à Lapide believes the same: "It is as if Christ had appointed to each nation its own disciple or teacher."<sup>21</sup>

Calvin connects and contrasts the sending of the twelve with the mission of the seventy-two. He believes that Christ sent the twelve apostles "to awaken the Jewish peoples to the hope of the approaching salvation" since the number of disciples corresponds to the number of the tribes of Israel. The seventy disciples, on the other hand, were entrusted to spread the news of salvation's coming "in *all* places."<sup>22</sup>

The author of the Pseudo-Augustinian *Libri Tres De Mirabilibus* believes that the total number of languages in the world "was seventy-two" based on the Table of Nations. This leads him to claim that, just as there are seventy-two languages spoken throughout the earth, "in the same way the Lord is said in the Gospel to have chosen seventy-two disciples, in addition to the first Apostles, through whom he might afterwards preach

<sup>16</sup> Seventy-two languages: Cyril of Jerusalem, *Strom.* 1.21; *Palaea Historica* 52 (in *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: More Noncanonical Scriptures* [ed. Bauckham et al.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013], 1:609); CG VI, 4, f. 61, 1.14-20, trans. R. Kasser, *Bibliothèque gnostique* 9 in *RTP* 43 (1970), 32. H. J. Weigand even demonstrates that some Germanic peoples believed that there were only seventy-two nations and languages in the world until the seventeenth century! ("The Two and Seventy Languages of the World," *The Germanic Review* 17 [1942], 241-260).

<sup>17</sup> Here J. M. Scott exaggerates: "In subsequent Jewish interpretation [after *Jub.* 44:33-34], any occurrence of the number 70...can be taken as a reference to the 70 nations" (*Geography in Early Judaism and Christianity: The Book of Jubilees* [SNTS 113; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002], 52). However, he fails to substantiate the generalization beyond the slaughter of the 70 bulls (*b. Sukkah* 52b par.; *ibid.*, 206 n. 60).

<sup>18</sup> Cyril of Alexandria, *Serm. Luc.* 60 (trans. R. P. Smith; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1859), 1:273.

<sup>19</sup> Ps.-Clem. *Recog.* 1.41 (ANF 8:88).

<sup>20</sup> Bede, *Commentaries to the Pentateuch* (PL 91:228).

<sup>21</sup> Cornelius à Lapide, *The Great Commentary* (trans. T. W. Mossman; London: John Hodges, 1887), Luke 10:1 *ad loc.*

<sup>22</sup> Calvin, *Commentaire des évangiles* (Paris: Meyrueis, 1854), 2:282. Calvin also recognizes both readings (seventy[-two]), linking the number to the elders chosen by Moses (Exod 18:22) and also the Sanhedrin. Just as the Sanhedrin was constituted after the return from the Babylonian exile, so too do the seventy heralds publish Jesus' coming and the beginning of a "perfect restoration" (*ibid.*, 282-83).

the same gospel to *all* peoples."<sup>23</sup> The author of the Greek *Tirburtine Sibyl* connects the number of languages with missions: "[Jesus] will take men from Galilee, give them his law and say to them: 'Preach the message that you receive from me to the peoples of the seventy-two languages.'"<sup>24</sup> Finally, Albert the Great sees the same correlation between languages and mission: "there are the seventy-two languages of the world to whom [the perfection of happiness] is preached, and seventy-two guides who have gone before us."<sup>25</sup>

The pattern is striking. Many early interpreters connect the number of followers that Jesus sent with the Table of Nations and the total number of languages. For them, Jesus' mission is "to *all* peoples"; "the *entire* world"; "in *all* places"; "so that the message of salvation would take possession of the *whole* world"; "to preach the Gospel to *all* the languages of the world"; "so that the preaching...of the blessed kingdom of God is sent into *all* the world."<sup>26</sup>

Why do early interpreters place so much weight on the importance of the disciples representing all nations and languages? Though it may be anachronistic to read a global missional concern back onto premodern exegesis, the universal impact of Luke 10:1 here is impressive. The globalizing stamp of Luke 10:1 in each example of premodern exegesis above implies that the gospel was intended to be indigenized in all cultures. As Lesslie Newbigin asserts, "the most fundamental element in culture is language."<sup>27</sup> Thus, news of the reign of God comes not in the form of cultural imperialism but is brought in the language of each culture—with both its invitation and its challenge.<sup>28</sup> The emphasis on all nations and languages leads us to Luke's next echo of the Table of Nations, the Pentecost narrative.

#### IV. PENTECOST

So far we have seen that Luke 10:1 likely recalls the number of nations in Genesis 10.<sup>29</sup> But what does this mean in practice? Surely Luke does not portray the disciples going to *all* nations under heaven. Rather, Jesus sends them "before him into every city and place where he himself was about to go" (Luke 10:1). The global reading, it would

<sup>23</sup> Ps.-Augustine, *Libri Tres De Mirabilibus Sacrae Scripturae* (PL 35 :2161). Translation of Robert J. Karis in Bónaventure, *op. cit.*, 924 n7.

<sup>24</sup> *Tirburtine Sibyl* (Greek), 46-47, in Bauckham et al., *OTP: More Noncanonical Scriptures*, 183.

<sup>25</sup> Albert the Great, *Enarr. Luc.* Vol. 23 of *Magni Opera Omnia* (ed. A. Borgnet; Paris: Ludovicus Vivès, 1890), Luke 10:1 *ad loc.* Cf. the *Glossa Ordinaria*: "As the form is that of bishops in the case of the Apostles, so the form is that of presbyters of the second order in the case of the seventy-two, who are sent to preach the Gospel to all the languages of the world" (*Biblia latina cum glossa ordinaria: Facsimile reprint of the Editio Princeps* [ed. Karlfried Froehlich and Margaret T. Gibson; Turnhout: Brepols, 1992], Luke 10:1 *ad loc.*).

<sup>26</sup> Ps.-Augustine, *Libri Tres De Mirabilibus Sacrae Scripturae* 1:9; Jerome, Ep. 78.6; Calvin, *Commentaire des évangiles*, 2:282; Cyril of Alexandria, *Serm. Luc.* 60, 273; *Glossa Ordinaria*, Luke 10:1; Ps.-Clem. *Recog.* 1.41.

<sup>27</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 185. *Idem.*, "Central to culture is language" (*Foolishness to the Greeks* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986], 3).

<sup>28</sup> Or, to use Andrew Wall's typology, the "pilgrim" and "indigenizing" principles describe missions vis-à-vis culture ("The Gospel as Prisoner and Liberator of Culture," in *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of the Faith* [Maryknoll: Orbis, 1996], 3-15 [7-8]).

<sup>29</sup> Of course, early interpreters do not think exclusively of one intertext for Luke 10:1. For the best compendium of possible meanings, see Hugo Grotius, *Annotationes in libros Evangeliorum* (Amsterdam: Joannis Blaeu, 1697), 2:712.



seem, runs into practical problems. The harvest is plentiful, the laborers are few, and the field is enormous.

I have suggested that the seventy(-two) represent the totality of the world's nations and languages. But the symbol of the seventy(-two) contains only potentiality. It signifies that the message of the reign of God embraces all languages and nations. But it does not enact this meaning. Indeed, this potentiality only becomes kinetic in Luke's second volume, the Acts of the Apostles.

If our argument is correct that seventy(-two) represents the totality of the world's nations and languages, then the connection to the Pentecost narrative becomes evident through comparison.<sup>30</sup> There, devout Jewish men "from every nation under heaven" are gathered together (Acts 2:5) and the wonderful deeds of God are proclaimed so that members of this multilingual audience understands "each in [their] own language" (2:8). Every nation and every language come together again, forming a bridge between the mission of the seventy(-two) and the Pentecost proclamation.<sup>31</sup> Thus the disciples, through the Spirit, are making good on the multi-cultural promise intimated earlier by the number seventy(-two).

If the sending of the seventy(-two) required knowledge of the Table of Nations to understand its full meaning, the Pentecost narrative demands knowledge of the next episode in Genesis, the Tower of Babel (Gen 11). Cyril of Jerusalem puts it best:

The multitude of those listening was confounded; it was a second confusion, in contrast to the first evil confusion at Babylon. In that former confusion of tongues there was a division of purpose, for the intention was impious. Here there was a restoration and union of minds, since the object of their seal was righteous. Through what occasioned the fall came recovery.<sup>32</sup>

According to Cyril, Luke's narrative is not a simple reversal of the Babel narrative but its sublimation. Significantly, the Pentecost narrative does not describe the return to a single, holy language. Instead, a Babel-like multiplicity of languages are spoken by the Spirit-infused believers. Many have noted the important interplay between particularity and universality in the Bible narrative. For example, a single individual, Abraham, is chosen in order to be a blessing to all nations.<sup>33</sup> The particular is meant to represent and bless the universal, the one for the many. But the principle should not be applied woodenly. In reading Luke 10 and the Pentecost narrative in concert, we see that there

<sup>30</sup> The thematic link between Babel and Pentecost is strong. Verbally, they are connected by συνεχούθη (Acts 2:7) and συγγέωμεν (Gen 11:7) and σύγχυστις (Gen 11:9). See further C. K. Barrett, *Acts of the Apostles* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 1:113. Also Richard Pervo, *Acts* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009), 61, who quotes Bede, 6: "The church in its humility recovers the unity of languages that Babylon in its arrogance had dispersed. At the spiritual level the variety of languages points to the gifts of different forms of grace" (trans. Pervo, *ibid.*, 62).

<sup>31</sup> See John Chrysostom, *Hom. Act. 4* (NPNF<sup>1</sup> 11:25).

<sup>32</sup> Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lecture* 17.16-17 (FC 64:106-7). So too Calvin: "punishment of human pride was turned into a matter of blessing. For where did the diversity of tongues come from, if not to bring to nothing the wicked and ungodly counsels of humans? (Gen 11:7) But God provided the apostles with the diversity of tongues now in order to bring and call home into a blessed unity those who wander here and there" (*Commentary on Acts*, 1:75).

<sup>33</sup> Richard Bauckham calls this "the most remarkable of all the instances of divinely chosen singularity in the Bible" (*Bible and Mission* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003], 28-29). See also Brownson, *Speaking the Truth in Love*, 19.

is no single elect language. "The word of God is to be spoken in every tongue," argues Newbigin, "but it can never be domesticated in any."<sup>34</sup> Or, in Lamin Sanneh's provocative formulation, "Translation is the original language of religion in early Christianity."<sup>35</sup> There has never been any linguistic particularity to the Gospel—a point that is already proleptically witnessed to in the sending of the seventy(-two) and further demonstrated at Pentecost.

Languages are sanctified as a means of vertical and horizontal communication at Pentecost. But what of nations? The story is fashioned within the context of Jewish national particularity: "there were devout Jewish men living in Jerusalem" (2:5).<sup>36</sup> So too, in the sending of the seventy(-two), one does not sense that the disciples are sent outside of Jewish environs. Yet seeds of the universalizing mission have already been sown in both narratives. As already noted, the seventy(-two) represent all nations. Likewise, the pilgrims who witness the Pentecost spectacle are "from every nation under heaven" (Acts 2:5). Though the pilgrims are all Jewish, their gathering from all nations anticipates the narrative trajectory of the rest of Acts. Indeed, Jesus' programmatic commission at the beginning of the book is of global scope: "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).<sup>37</sup> The mission is ever expanding, exploding outward from the singularity of Pentecost in Jerusalem and hurtling, by the end of Acts, toward the ends of the earth. Having overcome linguistic barriers at Pentecost, the good news will go on to break down national, ethnic and cultural dividing walls as well. In Luke-Acts, the message is for all languages, nations, and cultures.

#### V. IN LIEU OF A CONCLUSION: IMPLICATIONS FOR MISSIONAL HERMENEUTICS

What have we learned from our exegetical and reception-historical survey? We are now in a position to synthesize our finding. I will make four suggestions for the continuing mission of the Church. These concern God's missionary character, the importance of *imitatio Christi*, the concentric pattern in Luke-Acts, and the role of nations and languages in the divine economy.

1. *God's missionary character*: The sending of the disciples is rooted in the sending of Christ. Put differently, the self-identity of the sent-ones stems from the *missio Christi*, which in turn stems from the *missio Dei*. The intra- and extra-Trinitarian action is captured well in David Bosch's theological formulation:

Mission [is] understood as being derived from the very nature of God. It [is] thus put in the context of the doctrine of the Trinity, not of ecclesiology or soteriology. The classical doctrine of the *missio Dei* as God the Father sending the Son, and God the Father and the Son sending

<sup>34</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 147.

<sup>35</sup> Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1989), 116.

<sup>36</sup> Though both *ἐλλαβεῖς* and *Ἰουδαῖοι* may be later additions to the text. For a likely history of transmission, see C. K. Barrett, *Acts*, 1:118.

<sup>37</sup> Careful readers of Acts will recall that Jesus' commission is an outline of Luke's entire second volume. Among others, see Raymond Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 1996), 281.



the Spirit [is] expanded to include yet another "movement": Father, Son, and Holy Spirit sending the church into the world.<sup>38</sup>

The spectacle of women and men speaking in many languages among Jews from "all nations under heaven" is in fact the act and therefore the character of the Triune God. This God is a God who sends. Within a Trinitarian framework, it is significant that both the second and the third members of the Trinity are sent. Thus, not only is *sending* part of the character of God, but so too is *being sent*. This missional Christology brings us to our next point.

2. *Imitatio*: Because Jesus himself is sent, the mission of his followers happens in *imitatio Christi*. Better still, it is *because* Jesus has been sent that the disciples can go. Just as Jesus goes out in authority to heal, exorcise, and proclaim the reign of God, so too will his followers whom he sends. As the master, so the disciple (Luke 6:40). The Church's missionary identity is inextricably rooted in Jesus' own missionary identity.

3. *Concentric*: Jesus sends the twelve, appoints the seventy(-two), and promises the Spirit to subsequent followers. The movement crescendoes. The goal, it would seem, is for the representatives of the totality of human culture to lose their representative role by becoming participants: "if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person" (Luke 10:6). Audience members are to become actors until all participate in the drama of salvation. By heralding the reign of God, Jesus' followers hope that others will become citizens of that reign. Similarly, the narrative movement of Acts pushes outward, enacting Jesus' commission to be his "witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

4. *Nations and languages*: Particularity and universality can be helpful categories, but not if applied too woodenly. The seventy(-two) represent and symbolize the totality of all nations of the earth. Here, particularity and universality appropriately capture the sent-ones' representative function. On the other hand, the use of languages in the Pentecost narrative—read in the shadow of the Tower of Babel—demonstrates that language should *not* be used as a universally representative particularity. Culture is irreducibly connected to language, and the Pentecost proclamation does not demonstrate the simple reversal of Babel but its sanctification. As Bede notes, "The church in its humility recovers the unity of languages that Babylon in its arrogance had dispersed." To imagine this in different terms, Babel is to Pentecost what the banishment from Eden is to the New Jerusalem. In both cases, the biblical narrative does not return to a pristine, primeval state; rather, even the errors of humankind are sanctified in the biblical narrative. *Endzeit* need not always become *Urzeit*. The Pentecost narrative does not harken back to the existence of a single, holy language.

<sup>38</sup> David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1991), 390, quoted in *Missional Theology* (ed. Darrell Guder; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 5. Cf. the Trinitarian formulation of Lesslie Newbigin, "The mission of the Church is to be understood, can only be rightly understood, in terms of the Trinitarian model..." (*The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society*, 118). Further into Peter's Pentecost address, a similar chain of giving is described: "God raised this Jesus up, of whom we all are witnesses. Then, exulted at the right hand of God, and having received the promise of the Holy Spirit from the Father, he poured out this that you both see and hear" (Acts 2:32-33). The Father gives the Spirit to the Son, who then pours it upon the gathered believers.

Instead, even the result of human sinfulness—the proliferation of languages—is taken up into God's gracious dealing with humanity.

If mission is the mother of the New Testament, it is hoped that readers of this missionary document will continue to recognize that they are sent to herald God's peaceable reign. There are many more than seventy(-two) followers today. Yet Jesus' gentle command to that small group still speaks to the Church in mission:

*The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few.*

*Therefore, ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest.*

*Go.*

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# The Church as Organism

## Herman Bavinck's ecclesiology for a postmodern context

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*As the Western church continues to see the decline of Christendom and the growth of post-modernism, the church is struggling with determining how she ought to exist in the world. Ought the church to pull away from culture? Accept culture? Strip away institutional forms? Focus on issues of social justice? This paper seeks to begin to answer these questions not primarily by asking what the church ought to do, but what she ought to be. It is a question of identity before a question of action; the former directs the latter.*

*To probe this question I turn to the ecclesiology of preeminent Dutch Reformed theologian Herman Bavinck. Following his elder contemporary Abraham Kuyper, Bavinck describes the church as an organism and as an institution. Though Kuyper wishes to regard both highly, he tends to emphasize the organic to such an extent that he unintentionally depreciates the institutional. Bavinck provides several correctives to his less systematic friend but unfortunately enters many of the same pitfalls and cannot remain entirely consistent. Nonetheless, by turning to his definition of the organic elsewhere, rooted in the unity-in-diversity of the Trinity, the inconsistencies may be accounted for. Bavinck implicitly accommodates himself.*

*To Bavinck, all creation is in a sense an organism because the impression of its three-in-one Creator remains upon it. An organism has four qualities: (1) unity and diversity; (2) unity which precedes diversity; (3) common ideals; and (4) shared goals. If the church is an organism in these terms, it follows that institutional structures may contribute to unifying the diverse parts (the communion of the saints, the elect, the gathered believers), imparting common ideals, and reaching shared goals. Furthermore, Bavinck finds the organic center of the church in Christ, who comes to us primarily in the Word and Spirit. Institutional structures must then proceed from the Word, itself an aspect of the church as institution. If the church is to remain faithful to her calling in the world, she must remember what she is: the body of Christ, bound in him by his Word, intent on glorifying God. From there, one may consider the ways in which the church stands as an antithetical witness against the world and as her members simultaneously permeate and influence the world in a postmodern context.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

As Herman Bavinck concluded an essay on the nature of the church, he succinctly captured its relation to the world: "In the midst of a world which does not know where it is going and which often because of discouragement and despair lapses into decay, the church issues its glad hope."<sup>1</sup> I have no doubt that Professor Guder, who has spent a lifetime calling on the church to live out its mission of hope in the world, would undoubtedly agree with this sentiment. We in the church, however, are left to wrestle with how our transformative message of hope is to be disseminated throughout the world. Because the church is struggling to demonstrate its relevance to a culture that increasingly perceives it as ancient and antiquated, some would argue that the church ought to accommodate culture. Others would wish, contrary to this, to see the church pull out of culture completely. Still others would suggest a completely new conception of an organic church, peeling away the institutional structures that have grown over time and that now bog down the church, submitting that this is a purer conception of what Christ intended for the church. How we begin to sort through the various notions of the mission of the church—what the church does—will be directly associated with what we believe the church is.

Herman Bavinck, the Dutch Neo-Calvinist of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, described the church as an organism and as an institution in order to help answer this question of *being* and so navigate the murky ecclesiastical waters of his own day. As James Eglinton notes, the organic motif in Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics* relates directly to his definitively Trinitarian doctrine of God,<sup>2</sup> and his ecclesiology, ripe with this motif, takes root in the Triune God who epitomizes unity-in-diversity. It is the purpose of this paper to analyze Bavinck's conception of the church as organism and as institution with Eglinton's understanding of Bavinck's organic motif, rooted in the unity-in-diversity of the Triune God, and, in doing so, to reveal that Bavinck does not remain entirely consistent with the language of organism. One may use Bavinck himself, however, to accommodate these inconsistencies by defining a church-as-organism model which *includes* the church as institution, providing us with a helpful heuristic in navigating the murky ecclesiastical waters of our own day and allowing us to constructively continue the conversation Professor Guder has encouraged us to have. With a clearer conception of what the church *is*, then, the church can engage the culture without losing sight of that which unifies it or its mission to spread the hope of the gospel.

## 2. BAVINCK IN CONVERSATION WITH KUYPER

2.1 *Similarities between Kuyper and Bavinck*

Abraham Kuyper, Bavinck's older contemporary who influenced his ecclesiology, tended to idealize the ideal, invisible, organic church over the mechanical, visible, institutional structures of the church. This problem impairs the ecclesiology of Bavinck

<sup>1</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1956), 543.

<sup>2</sup> James Eglinton, "Bavinck's organic motif: questions seeking answers," *Calvin Theological Journal* 45, no. 1 (2010): 62-65.

as well, although he enlightens much of Kuyper's understanding with a more systematic approach. Despite these impairments, both are striving for their ecclesiology to reach certain laudable ends. One's ecclesiology needs to describe the church in such a way that diverse institutional forms may reside within it, for uniformity clashes with God's design for diversity within creation.<sup>3</sup> It ought to be distinct from other institutions, such as the state; however, it must not take flight from the world but engage culture organically with an all-pervasive influence. Framed differently from their perspective, ecclesiology must avoid the institutionalism of the Roman Catholics, who focus on the hierarchy and means of grace, and the pure organicism of groups like the Quakers, who concentrate the church around the gathering of believers only, while fighting off a mechanically-driven, individually-oriented modernism. Sharing these concerns with Kuyper, Bavinck distinguishes the church as organism from the church as institution. "[The church] is a gathered company (*coetus*) but also the mother of believers (*mater fidelium*); an organism but also an institution; a goal but also the means to that goal."<sup>4</sup> The organism is the gathered individuals and the end goal; the institution is the mother of believers and means to that goal.

## 2.2 Bavinck and church as organism

As Kuyper seems to do, Bavinck also locates the essence of the church in the gathering of believers, not in hierarchy.<sup>5</sup> "[One] may have the form but lack the substance,"<sup>6</sup> and that substance is the gathering of a single, unified organism. In order to drive this point home, Bavinck draws upon the biblical images of the church, all of which connote a whole, living entity: the body of Christ, the bride of Christ, the sheepfold, the temple or house of God, a tree consisting of branches, etc.<sup>7</sup> Carrying the essence of the church, the gathering (*coetus*) is the goal. In this sense, the organism is passive as nonbelievers are called into "a community of faith and life."<sup>8</sup> By their "witness and walk...they distinguish themselves from the world," and they do this organically, as individual believing members of a single, spiritual entity.

## 2.3 Bavinck and church-as-institution

The institution, on the other hand, is manifest in the offices of the church—deacon, elder, or bishop—as well as the means of grace—the Word and the sacraments.<sup>9</sup> Sharing Kuyper's concern, institutional forms may rightly take varying shapes, but the church as institution, whatever form it takes, still serves as the mother of believers (*mater fidelium*), i.e. the means by which the goal, the gathered community, is achieved.<sup>10</sup> One must not overlook the necessity of the church as institution for this reason. At this point, however, the problems inherent in Kuyper exist in Bavinck as well, for although the

<sup>3</sup> RD 4.318. Cf. Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, 16-17, 50; and Zwaanstra, 177.

<sup>4</sup> RD 4.303.

<sup>5</sup> RD 4.288-89, 303, 310, 317.

<sup>6</sup> RD 4.284.

<sup>7</sup> RD 4.298.

<sup>8</sup> RD 4.330.

<sup>9</sup> RD 4.304.

<sup>10</sup> RD 4.303, 330.



church as institution holds a significant position in his ecclesiology, it would appear that the institution is secondary to the organism, against his claims that neither one holds priority over the other.<sup>11</sup> One could still find reason to neglect the church as institution in order to seek “true” unity.<sup>12</sup>

### 3. DEPARTING FROM KUYPER

#### 3.1 *Self-corrective*

In order to reach the ends in his ecclesiology, Bavinck provides several correctives to Kuyper. One, Kuyper articulates the church as institution in mechanical terms: It is an apparatus constructed and established by humans, lasting only for a time.<sup>13</sup> Although “when all [institutional forms] are removed from the screen of our mind, the church is still visible,” implying that the church as institution is indeed temporary, Bavinck will not accept “the notion that the institution was mechanically added as something accidental and external to the church as the gathering of believers.”<sup>14</sup> Two, both theologians place the essence of the church on the gathering of believers, their basic description of the church as organism. This, however, does not represent the ideal for Bavinck. The ideal can only be expressed in the eschatological category “kingdom of God”; therefore, “it is not advisable to replace the word ‘church’ in the sense of ‘the people of God’ with the expression ‘kingdom of God.’”<sup>15</sup> Nor does the church as organism refer to the body of believers that spans time and place—the true, invisible church. This leads to Bavinck’s third corrective to Kuyper. Organism and institution are both descriptions of the *visible* church. Bavinck is adamant on this point. The gathering of the people of God (organism) occurs visibly in conjunction with the ministerial offices and means of grace (institution).<sup>16</sup> “The church, however, is especially a *this-worldly term*, a fellowship of persons equipped with offices and ministries that function in the visible world as the gathered people of God.”<sup>17</sup> Neither can be termed ideal or invisible because “[one] may have the form [institution] but lack the substance

<sup>11</sup> RD 4.330.

<sup>12</sup> James Perman Eglinton, *Trinity and Organism: towards a new reading of Herman Bavinck’s organic motif*, vol. 17 in *T&T Clark Studies in Systematic Theology* (New York: Bloombury Publishing, 2012), 195. Eglinton rightly notes, “Neither [the church as organism or institution] takes precedence: the presence of one always necessitates the other,” citing RD 4.330 and 4.340. However, in 193, he quotes: “[God] imparts these gifts [of grace] exclusively by means of the offices and sacraments. The institution, accordingly, has priority over the organism” (RD 4.285). This is a misreading of Bavinck. If he errs to one side, which I will argue later he mostly avoids, it is to give preference to the organic. The quote from RD 4.285 is the beginning of a long discourse in which Bavinck describes the Roman Catholic conception of the church, moves to Luther’s understanding, follows this with the Reformed perspective, and ends with modern notions of the church, specifically the rationalism of Kant and Hegel and the mysticism of Anabaptists and Pietists, before reiterating his nuanced Reformed position.

<sup>13</sup> Kuyper, “Common Grace,” 187. In Zwaanstra, 156, on the relationship between mechanism and organism: “Mechanisms and aggregates were the veritable opposite of organisms because they were formed from outside by an imposed combination of parts.”

<sup>14</sup> RD 4.305.

<sup>15</sup> RD 4.297. It is problematic, then, that in RD 4.303, he refers to the organic aspect of the church as the goal. If the organism is not the ideal kingdom of God, it is unclear what he means by goal here.

<sup>16</sup> RD 4.305.

<sup>17</sup> RD 4.297–298 (emphasis added).

[organism],”<sup>18</sup> but contrarily, one may contain the substance but lack the form as Nathan the Syrian does (2 Kings 5). In the visible church as organism and institution, the “old Adam” has a way of infiltrating the gathering and structures<sup>19</sup> so that “there are no true and false churches in an absolute sense.”<sup>20</sup> Placing both aspects in the realm of the visible creates a stronger bond between the two. The organic church no longer exists up in the ethereal clouds of the ideal; it has been brought down to earth to be seen, felt, and heard, just as we see the church offices, feel the physicality of the sacraments, and hear the Word proclaimed.

### 3.2 Unresolved tension

Ostensibly, Bavinck has smoothed over much of the tension between the pull of the organism into the ideal and the pull of the institution away from the ideal. The ideal is in fact the eschatological kingdom of God, of which the organic and institutional aspects of the church lay the foundation. One may not neglect the church as institution, therefore, as if to seek out some other, unadulterated church existence. Unfortunately, the harmony achieved at the marriage of these two aspects disintegrates almost immediately after their honeymoon bliss. Kuyper often implemented the language of organism and institution in order to depict the ways in which the church ought to engage the culture. As the institution, with its specific offices and with the Word and sacraments, it stands as an antithetical witness against culture, and as the organism, the gathering community, its individual members permeate all spheres of life. Bavinck would refer to this as the church acting as the mother of believers (*mater fidelium*); the church as a whole is the means by which God calls people into the church itself. But the church as a whole is more than a means to engage the culture. It is a thing in and of itself—the gathered company (*coetus*), which is always gathered in a specific form.<sup>21</sup> Here we encounter the discord. Alongside the offices, Word, and sacraments (institution), the gathering (organism) acts as a means of grace to unbelievers (*mater fidelium*). But the gathering (*coetus*) “is manifest in both the institution and the organism.”<sup>22</sup> Having described the institution as the means of grace and the organism as the gathering of the people of God, he now grants to each aspect of the visible church what he previously granted to the other aspect.<sup>23</sup> Their relationship is complicated to say the least.

<sup>18</sup> RD 4.284. Cf. RD 4.304: “For external membership, calling, and baptism are no proof of genuine faith. Many are called who are not chosen. Many are baptized who do not believe. Not all are Israel who are of Israel.”

<sup>19</sup> RD 4.306.

<sup>20</sup> RD 4.318.

<sup>21</sup> RD 4.331-2.

<sup>22</sup> RD 4.332.

<sup>23</sup> Eglinton, *Trinity and Organism*, 197-200. On 200, Eglinton rightly concludes that Bavinck does not butt heads with Kuyper regarding the manner in which the church relates to the world. Elsewhere, Bavinck employs the language of pearl (Matt. 13:45-46) and leaven (Matt. 13:33) in order to communicate a similar idea. The church stands against the world as something of infinite worth (pearl) and permeates the world with special grace (leaven), roughly equivalent with Kuyper’s institution and organism. However, the church as pearl and leaven is more closely associated with the church as *coetus* and *mater fidelium* in Bavinck’s *Reformed Dogmatics* than with the gathering of believers and means of grace, for both the gathering of believers and means of grace constitute the pearl/*coetus* and leaven/*mater fidelium*. This conflicts with Eglinton’s conclusion that the pearl is

This relationship is no less complicated by this statement: "For office and gift, the administration of the Word and sacraments, brotherly love and the communion of the saints, are all grounded in the operations of the glorified head of the church [Christ] through the Holy Spirit."<sup>24</sup> Whereas before, Bavinck simply lowered the organism into the visible; now the institution has gained increased significance, finding its source *directly* in Christ. If the institution is not "mechanically added" by humans, is there a sense in which the institution is organic? This seems plausible given the definitional tension noted above, but the tension remains unresolved since Bavinck uses the terms as two separate descriptions of the visible church. While Bavinck provides explicit correctives to Kuyper, his own work implicitly accommodates his inconsistencies.

#### 4. RESOLVING THE TENSION

##### 4.1 *Organic motif rooted in the doctrine of God*

As Eglinton has attentively perceived in his work *Trinity and Organism*, Bavinck's organic motif finds its origin in the unity and diversity of a definitively definitively Trinitarian doctrine of God. Indeed, for Bavinck all theology, and all of life, proceeds from the Trinity:

The thinking mind situates the doctrine of the Trinity squarely amid the full-orbed life of nature and humanity... And it is the task of Christian theologians to present clearly the connectedness of God's revelation with, and its significance for, all of life. The Christian mind remains unsatisfied until all of existence is referred back to the triune God, and until the confession of God's Trinity functions at the center of our thought and life.<sup>25</sup>

Therefore, in order to rectify Bavinck's inconsistencies and tensions and to construct a more comprehensive ecclesiology that that we might adapt to the challenges of the church today, it is requisite that that we identify the extent to which Bavinck's doctrine of God shapes his ecclesiology. Doing so will demonstrate that Bavinck's previous correctives to Kuyper were on the right track and that he very nearly met the concerns he shared with his Neo-Calvinist contemporary.

Even in the division of the four volumes of his *Dogmatics*, his preoccupation with the Trinity as his point of origin is apparent. Following his *Prolegomena*, he entitled the three following volumes *God and Creation*; *Sin and Salvation in Christ*; and *Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation*, a tacit parallel to the Apostles' Creed. In addition to the pantheism of Hegel, Bavinck wrote explicitly against the "deterministic, antsupernatural, and monistic" theology of his Leiden professor, Johannes Scholten.<sup>26</sup> Even more, *Reformed Dogmatics* "reads like a running battle between Trinitarian and non-Trinitarian theologies. Bavinck's constant sparring partners are modalists, pantheists, polytheists,

synonymous with institution and the leaven with organism. This cannot be the case because, as Eglinton cites Bolt, "[the gospel] is a treasure or pearl first and foremost; the leavening role is *secondary*." Certainly he does not wish to conclude that the institution therefore precedes the organism in importance. The error for Protestants tends to be just the opposite. See, John Bolt, "A Pearl and a Leaven," *John Calvin and Evangelical Theology: Legacy and Prospect*, ed. Sung Wook Chung (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2009), 263.

<sup>24</sup> RD 4.305.

<sup>25</sup> RD 2.330.

<sup>26</sup> Eglinton, "Bavinck's organic motif," 59.



atheists, monists, *et al.*<sup>27</sup> Therefore, the Trinity must serve as one's starting point for analyzing any facet of Bavinck's theology.

#### 4.2 Unity-in-diversity

Beginning with the patristic fathers and continuing to the medieval scholastics and beyond, theologians often make reference to the *vestigia trinitatis*, seeing representations of the divine Godhead in nature. Bavinck embraced this to an extent—more so than the Reformers anyways—because “although God is unlike anything else, all else is nonetheless like him.”<sup>28</sup> In Bavinck's own words: “If God is indeed triune, this has to be supremely important, for all things, according to the apostle, are from him and through him and to him (Rom. 11:36).”<sup>29</sup> God as Creator leaves his imprint on his creation. While theologians have often looked for three-in-one analogues to God, Bavinck reforms this type of *vestigia trinitatis*. Rather, “the Trinity reveals God to us as the fullness of being, the true life, eternal beauty. In God, too, there is *unity in diversity, diversity in unity*. Indeed, this order and this harmony is present in him absolutely.”<sup>30</sup> In creation, therefore, analogues of the Trinity come to us not simply in a three-in-one composition; this is too simplistic. “Everything was created with a nature of its own and rests in ordinances established by God... There is the most profuse diversity, yet, in that diversity, there is also a superlative kind of unity. The foundation of both diversity and unity is *in God*... In virtue of this unity the world can, metaphorically, be called an *organism*, in which all parts are connected with each other and influence each other reciprocally.”<sup>31</sup> Here we get a sense of the organic motif in general as situated in the doctrine of the unity and diversity of the Trinity.

#### 4.3 Characteristics of the organism

Eglinton finds in this quotation (RD 2.435-36), and elsewhere in Bavinck's *Dogmatics*, four characteristics of the organic motif, which Bavinck makes more explicit in *Christelijke Wereldbeschouwing*. Keeping in mind that “a theology of Trinity *ad intra* requires a cosmology of organicism *ad extra*,”<sup>32</sup> Eglinton summarizes these characteristics: (1) “The created order is marked by simultaneous unity and diversity”; (2) “unity precedes diversity”; (3) “the organism's shared life is orchestrated by a common idea”; and (4) “the organism has a drive towards its goal [*its telos*]... the glory of the Triune God.”<sup>33</sup> With these characteristics, the organism does not, however, stand alone, completely disconnected from its Creator. God himself provides a connection to his creation: “In Christ, in the middle of history, God created an *organic center*; from this center, in an ever widening sphere, God drew circles within which the light of revelation shines... Presently the grace of God appears to all human beings. The Holy

<sup>27</sup> Eglinton, *Trinity and Organism*, 101.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

<sup>29</sup> RD 2.331.

<sup>30</sup> RD 2.331 (emphasis added).

<sup>31</sup> RD 2.435-6 (emphasis added).

<sup>32</sup> Eglinton, “Bavinck's organic motif,” 63.

<sup>33</sup> Eglinton, “Bavinck's organic motif,” 63-64, summarizing Herman Bavinck, *Christelijke Wereldbeschouwing*, (Kampen: Kok, 1904), 50-65.

Spirit takes everything from Christ, adding nothing new to revelation.”<sup>34</sup> It is with these characteristics and Christ as the organic center that we may evaluate Bavinck’s usage of organism and institution in his ecclesiology.

##### 5. ACCOMMODATING BAVINCK WITH BAVINCK

In describing the gathering of the people of God as an organism, Bavinck, according to his own criteria for an organism, implicitly attaches these characteristics to the church. There is unity-in-diversity,<sup>35</sup> shared ideals, and a common *telos*. Indeed, Bavinck indicates that “all the churches are conceived of as one ἐκκλησία and described as the body, the bride, or the fullness (πληρωμα, *plērōma*) of Christ.”<sup>36</sup> This applies easily to the gathering of believers, who, as individual members, constitute the whole.<sup>37</sup> Additionally, the *telos* of the church—to glorify God—is accomplished by the people as well. Does the church as institution play no part in unifying the church, imparting its ideals, or actualizing its *telos*? It certainly does! Bavinck himself specified that “the purpose of the church as an institution consists in gathering the elect [unity], in building up the body of Christ, in perfecting the saints [common ideals], and thus in glorifying God (Eph. 4:11) [*telos*].”<sup>38</sup> Interestingly, Bavinck founds both the church as organism and the church as institution in Christ, which previously proved to be problematic, for it confused the organism with the institution. But, remembering that Christ is the organic center of the organism, we can, according to Bavinck’s characteristics of an organism, rightly say that the gathering of believers *along with* the offices and means of grace instituted by Christ comprise the *whole organism*. The institutional structures contribute to the unity, ideals, and *telos* of the church. It is, therefore, more appropriate to speak of the aspects of the church as pearl and leaven, or *coetus* and *mater fidelium*, rather than organism and institution. The church is the gathered and the gathering community; it is the antithetical witness and the permeating influence. This is what Bavinck was moving towards, but by applying organism to the gathered community alone, the institutional still remained in the periphery. Focusing on the unity-in-diversity (organic) motif founded in Bavinck’s doctrine of God, it is now possible to apply the church-as-organism model to the challenges facing the church in the evermore post-Christian West in order to seek out ways in which the church can maintain its unity while allowing for diversity and following its mission by engaging the culture.

##### 6. SEEKING UNITY

In the last several decades, the percentage of Americans who identify as Protestant has declined while the percentage of the religiously unaffiliated has increased. Of this number, many still consider themselves to be “spiritual but not religious.” The youngest generations have experienced the greatest increase in the percentage of

<sup>34</sup> RD 1.383 (emphasis added).

<sup>35</sup> In framing it as such, I am collapsing the first two characteristics into one.

<sup>36</sup> RD 4.280. Bavinck illustrates this point by citing Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 12:12-28; 15:9; Gal. 1:13; Eph. 1:22; 5:32; Phil. 3:6; and Col. 1:18, 24-25.

<sup>37</sup> The language of the whole preceding its parts is found often in Kuyper’s and Bavinck’s use of the organic motif as noted above.

<sup>38</sup> RD 4.377.

religiously unaffiliated persons with that number decreasing as age increases.<sup>39</sup> Has the church lost itself in the past, unable to translate the gospel in a postmodern context? Many have responded with answers to this puzzling problem. From the post-evangelical, emerging church to the “organic” house church movement to the social-justice-oriented church, most, in my view, fall short of providing a sufficient answer. The vision to see what unifies the church and how that unity is maintained has faded. Attempts are made to redefine secondary and tertiary matters, but without a clear view of primary matters, essential Christian convictions are subject to radical, and not always beneficial, alteration.

### 6.1 *Word and Spirit*

The discussions concerning the church in the world often begin—as good, democratic Americans will have them—from a view of the people. What stylistic or doctrinal issues do people find to be unpleasant or troubling, and how might the church reform in order to address their concerns? What deeds must the church perform for its members or others in order to remain culturally relevant? This people-oriented perspective is seen as more faithful to Protestant Christianity since the opposite would be a top-down approach more conducive to Roman Catholicism,<sup>40</sup> in which the steadfastness of the institution trumps all concerns, and this will not do for good, democratic Americans. Considering the church-as-organism model, neither approach is correct. Bavinck reminds us: “The church is not a democracy in which a people governs itself.”<sup>41</sup> Rather, “its government is strictly monarchical. And Christ was not only king in the past but he also is that still. From heaven he governs his church on earth by his Word and Spirit.”<sup>42</sup> The organism finds its bearing amidst the worldly chaos in its organic center: Jesus Christ. Any schema which regards church polity in any other terms is, for Bavinck, conceptually erroneous. The members do indeed constitute the essence of the one, whole body of Christ, but this living organism with its members remains lifeless without the lifeblood of Christ flowing constantly through its veins and the breath of the Spirit filling its lungs with God’s presence.

The unity of the church proceeds from the unified Triune God penetrating the organism through the Word of God and his Spirit. “The kingship of Christ over his church consists in that by his Word and Spirit he gathers and governs his own and protects and keeps them in the redemption acquired.”<sup>43</sup> The belief that the Word and Spirit permeate and enliven the church saturates Bavinck’s organic ecclesiology.<sup>44</sup> While the Word refers to Jesus himself (John 1), it also captures the doctrine that Scripture communicates the authoritative words of God to the church. Because Christ directly

<sup>39</sup> “Nones’ on the Rise,” The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, last modified October 9, 2012, <http://www.pewforum.org/Unaffiliated/nones-on-the-rise.aspx>.

<sup>40</sup> In his polemics against Catholicism, Bavinck clearly has a post-Vatican I and pre-Vatican II Catholic Church in mind. It would be interesting to compare the Vatican II emphasis on the church as the people of God with Bavinck’s emphases.

<sup>41</sup> RD 4.379.

<sup>42</sup> RD 4.388.

<sup>43</sup> RD 4.372.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. RD 4.332, 372, 394-5, 418, 437, 457, 486, 488.



instituted the apostolate,<sup>45</sup> and the apostles wrote the canonized books of the New Testament with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit,<sup>46</sup> “the apostles were and remain the founders of the church. Through their witness they are the foundation of the church. There is no communion with Christ except by communion with their witness!”<sup>47</sup> The Word, a text seemingly unspiritual and un-organic, a product of an institution,

is truly the soul of the church. All ministry in the church is a ministry of the Word. God gives his Word to the church, and the church accepts, preserves, administers, and teaches it; it confesses it before God, before one another, and before the world in word and deed. In the one mark of the Word the others are included as further applications.<sup>48</sup>

Christ, the organic center, enters the church as organism through his Word, a steadfast and institutional means of grace. Therefore, in seeking to answer the questions facing the church, its leaders must not turn initially to its people or its institutional structures, but they must look principally *to* the Word and *in* the Word, and *through* the Word in order to view all else. On earth, of course, “there exists no infallible interpretation of that Word,”<sup>49</sup> yet “the Holy Spirit unites with the Word (*cum verbo*)”<sup>50</sup> as a “subjective activity...[that] has to be added to the objective word.”<sup>51</sup> It is in this manner that the Word and Spirit seamlessly work in conjunction with one another. Scripture, constant in its content, forms a center of gravity for truth by which the Spirit draws the church as organism into constancy of mission.

## 6.2 *Offices and sacraments*

The unity of the church is a spiritual unity.<sup>52</sup> But in contrast to those who would seek to liberate the pure, “organic” church from its institutional shackles, Bavinck notes, “Being and form...are never so loosely and indifferently conjoined or opposed to each other...A good government is needed precisely in order that the Word and sacraments may be properly administered and that doctrine and life may be organized accordingly.”<sup>53</sup> As noted above, the institution, characterized by offices, the Word, and sacraments, finds its center in Christ. Just as the Spirit unites with the objective Word, so too does the Spirit unite with the offices and sacraments in such a way that the institution cannot be separate from what Bavinck unsuitably calls the organism, the gathering of believers. With their origins in Christ, whose Spirit sustains them, these institutional features constitute the bones, tendons, and ligaments of the organic body. Without a Christ-instituted structure in place, the body might have life in its members, but it lay limp and devoid of action. Its feet do not spread the gospel, and its hands do not labor in acts of love and mercy in the name of Jesus. An organism with no means of directing itself towards its *telos* by the ideals shared among its members is not an

<sup>45</sup> RD 4.333.

<sup>46</sup> RD 4.338.

<sup>47</sup> RD 4.363.

<sup>48</sup> RD 4.312.

<sup>49</sup> RD 4.317.

<sup>50</sup> RD 4.457.

<sup>51</sup> RD 4.460.

<sup>52</sup> RD 4.279-84, 303, 308, 319-20, 430, 487; Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith*, 522.

<sup>53</sup> RD 4.369.

organism at all, for it would mirror a creator whose being could be characterized only as blind, loveless fate, in contrast to the meticulous, loving providence of the Creator revealed in Christ and his Word.

No denomination may reform the offices of the church or the necessity of the sacraments, for these are specified by the Word as means of grace through which the Spirit knits the members together in order to witness to the world to the glory of God. It is the spiritual, the unseen, which binds us, but "because we are not [disembodied] spirits but sensuous earthly creatures who can only understand spiritual things when they come to us in humanly perceptible forms, God instituted the sacraments."<sup>54</sup> As Bavinck clarifies, though the Spirit *always* works through these means, making them essential to the gathering of God's people, the Spirit does not *only* work through these means and is free to impart grace through other means.<sup>55</sup> A local church, accordingly, has been given the freedom to seek the guidance of the Spirit in adding elements of worship through which the Spirit may be pleased to form faithful witnesses, but this follows the necessity of the primary proclamation of the Word and secondary administration of the sacraments. Likewise, the Christ-ordained and Spirit-led offices of the church are essential in shepherding the gathering. In the church as organism, the chief office is not presbyter or elder, however, but believer. Each believer is rendered a gift with spiritual grounding. Christ imparts to some gifts of leadership and places them in specific roles, so that the emphasis is not on the hierarchical offices themselves, but the working of the Spirit alongside a called believer, through whom the church may maintain its organic qualities.<sup>56</sup>

## 7. EVALUATION AND CONCLUSION

It would appear that while the organic motif pervades Bavinck's ecclesiology, his focus is primarily institutional.<sup>57</sup> Where, in fact, is there room for diversity, except perhaps in certain aspects of worship style? Indeed, if Bavinck desired to define the church in such a way that pluriformity resulted, he seems to have failed. He constantly and firmly polemicizes against Roman Catholics, Lutherans, and Anabaptists. This is not conducive for building unity. Such a conclusion misreads Bavinck on two levels. First, although he often establishes his position in contrast to others, he acknowledges that some might draw different conclusions than his own, being certain that no one interprets the Word of God absolutely faithfully, and they are compelled, and must be permitted, to live according to their convictions. Major ecclesiological differences might result, and Bavinck finds this temporarily permissible. Second, boundaries concern Bavinck less than essential matters that define the center. His objective is to demonstrate that the church is a living entity, an organism, whose *telos* necessitates glorifying God and whose life and breath is found in no one or thing other than Jesus Christ—his Word and Spirit. Jesus saves individuals into this whole body, that they

<sup>54</sup> RD 4.489.

<sup>55</sup> RD 4.489.

<sup>56</sup> RD 4.375.

<sup>57</sup> Indeed, RD 4.326-388 centers primarily on government of the church, and RD 4.441-588 covers the Word and sacraments, all institutional aspects of the church.

might, with their diversity, form a spiritual union with him and each other. And a basic institutional structure enlivened by the Spirit accomplishes this—by offices, sacraments, and most importantly, the very Word of God. He is not defining the boundaries and excluding some, but defining the center and turning our attention towards it.

Centering the church on Christ has been, is, and will continue to remain necessary if the church is to live out its calling faithfully. We will continue to debate secondary and tertiary doctrinal issues, and we will continue to struggle with realizing the proper ways to engage culture with God's love. But if we fail to remember what the church is—one, God-glorifying body redeemed by Christ's atoning work and whose members are bound by his Spirit with particular institutional means—we will no doubt confuse secondary and tertiary matters with primary matters and be misguided in our engagement with the world. Corrected by his definitively Trinitarian doctrine of God, from which the organic motif acquires its basis, Bavinck avoids ecclesiological catastrophe by depicting the church as an organism. In doing so, he implored his peers, and he implores us today, to remember: "That which unites all true Christians is always more than that which separates them."<sup>58</sup> And that which unites us is the Word and Spirit of Jesus Christ.

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# Eucharist as Communion

## The Eucharist and the Absolute in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*

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G.W.F. Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* is ripe with allusions to the Eucharist. In this paper I explore the various Eucharistic references in this important work of Hegel's in order to discover how they are functioning in Hegel's argument. I make the interpretative claim that for Hegel the Eucharist represents the presence of absolute spirit in the religious community. By following the symbols of the Eucharist in the development of Hegel's *Phenomenology* we can see the full development of consciousness from the immediacy of sense certainty to the presence of absolute Spirit amongst the community. Finally, I will conclude with potential ramifications of this thesis for thinking about mission in the context of religious communities. Namely, that the Eucharist represents a purposive social practice which directs the community toward justice, mission, and therefore the advent of spirit.

G.W.F. Hegel does not make things easy for his readers, often planting seeds that only bear fruit much later in the text. An example of this is his use of the Eucharist and related imagery in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. In addition to their expected place in the "Religion" section, references to bread and wine appear in the Preface to describe the Absolute as a "Bacchanalian Revel," in the "Sense Certainty" chapter at the breakdown of the first formation of consciousness, and in the adapted poem from Schiller that constitutes the final words of the work.<sup>2</sup> Based on these examples alone, the elements of

<sup>1</sup> This paper arose out of a class at Princeton University on Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* with Dr. Jeffrey Stout. I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Stout for allowing me to participate in this class and for his insightful comments and help with this paper. Further, I am thankful for Craig Wiley and Allen Wilson for their editorial help.

<sup>2</sup> References to the *Phenomenology* will be the paragraph number of G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, facing page translation, trans. Terry Pinkard, <http://terrypinkard.weebly.com/phenomenology-of-spirit-page.html>. These paragraph numbers, from the 2013 version, are for the purposes of this paper the same as those found in G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), unless otherwise noted, ¶47, ¶109, ¶808.

bread and wine seem to be important for the development of spirit in the *Phenomenology*.<sup>3</sup>

Given that Hegel understands religious symbols as representations of the conceptual truths of philosophy, in this paper I will explore Hegel's use of Eucharistic imagery in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* in order to discover what bread and wine tell us about absolute spirit.<sup>4</sup> I will offer the interpretative claim that the Eucharist represents the presence of the absolute spirit in the community. I will show this by exploring the role that Eucharistic symbols play in the *Phenomenology*, particularly the Religion section. First, bread and wine show the inadequacy of sense-certainty, leading to the movement from Natural Religion to the Religion of Art. In the Religion of Art, cultic practices partially overcome the distinction between the community and the divine, making Spirit present through practices such as ritual eating of bread and wine in the cults of Ceres and Bacchus. Finally, in the "Revealed Religion" section absolute Spirit becomes fully manifest in the community through the incarnation; here Hegel's Lutheran understanding of the Eucharist from his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* will be important in showing how the Eucharist overcomes the immediacy of the incarnation and represents the presence of absolute spirit among the community. Finally, I will use this discussion to make sense of Hegel's description of the absolute knowing in terms of the Eucharist, showing how the Eucharist is a major symbol of absolute knowing for Hegel. In sum, by following the symbols of the Eucharist in the development of Hegel's *Phenomenology* we can see a full development of consciousness from the immediacy of sense-certainty to the presence of absolute spirit among the community. From here we can then ask how this presence, as seen in the Eucharist, shapes the community's norms and impacts their approach to mission. In light of this, I will conclude with two potential ramifications of this thesis for thinking about mission in the context of religious communities.

#### IMMEDIACY AND THE NATURAL RELIGION

Hegel's treatment of religion occurs in three movements: Natural Religion, The Religion of Art, and Revealed Religion. Eucharistic allusions play a key role in each of these stages. In order to understand how Eucharistic symbols function for Natural Religion, it is important to turn to "Sense-Certainty," the first chapter of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Beyond Hegel's description in the preface of the True as a "Bacchanalian Revel," this is the first place in the work where bread and wine play a pivotal role, revealing the shortcomings of sense-certainty as a formation of consciousness.<sup>5</sup> According to sense-certainty, objects can be known and comprehended

<sup>3</sup> There is some debate as to whether "spirit," as Hegel uses it, should be capitalized. This often, though not exclusively, hinges on the translator's understanding of what spirit is for Hegel: if spirit is taken as being divine then it is generally capitalized, if it is something less ontologically rich it is not. I have opted not to capitalize it here in order to accord with the majority of the secondary sources I interact with, which emphasize the social rather than ontological aspects of what "spirit" is. See William E. Conklin, *Hegel's Laws: The Legitimacy of a Modern Legal Order* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008), 36; Robert C. Solomon, *In the Spirit of Hegel: A Study of G.W.F. Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 168.

<sup>4</sup> Pinkard, *Hegel's Phenomenology: The Sociality of Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 255.

<sup>5</sup> 47

immediately through our natural awareness of them. In other words, we are passive in the act of knowing, directly knowing things without barrier; here our knowledge of objects is *un-mediated*.<sup>6</sup> As such sense-certainty is the first formation of consciousness, appearing “immediately as the *richest* knowledge, indeed, as a knowledge of an infinite wealth for which no boundary is to found,” taking itself to have “its object in its entirety before itself.”<sup>7</sup> This is to say that sense-certainty understands itself to have unmediated knowledge of objects, knowing them as they are without any interpretative contribution on the part of the subject.<sup>8</sup> For example, under the formation of sense-certainty, when I see a paper coffee cup I understand myself to have knowledge of it through the raw data of sensory experience, immediately knowing what it is.

Yet, as Hegel shows, all sense-certainty can affirm is the pure being of objects. Sense-certainty cannot know definite particulars; instead all it can say is that the object exists, for “its truth merely contains the *being* of the item.”<sup>9</sup> This means that when I encounter our paper coffee cup, all sense-certainty can do is say that the cup is there, that it exists as a singular object. As such sense-certainty cannot break the cup down into the particularities that constitute it, for instance that it is round and white.<sup>10</sup> Pure being is then the essence of sense-certainty.<sup>11</sup> However, pure being itself is an abstraction, as even it turns out to be mediated through both the object and the observing subject.<sup>12</sup> To return to the coffee cup example, in order to know that what I am observing is a coffee cup I need to already have the appropriate concept, namely “coffee cup,” in place in order to contribute it to the interpretative act. Sense-certainty is thus revealed by Hegel to in fact be perception: we cannot ascribe predicates to objects based on immediate awareness, not even the abstract notion of being.<sup>13</sup>

Hegel goes on to claim that all this is revealed in Greek cultic mysteries of bread and wine. As he cryptically advises,

In this respect, what one can say to those who make assertions about the truth and reality of sensuous objects is that they should be sent back to the most elementary school of wisdom, namely, the old Eleusinian mysteries of Ceres and Bacchus and that they have yet to learn the mystery of the eating of bread and the drinking of wine. This is so because the person who has been initiated into these secrets not merely comes to doubt the being of sensuous things.

Rather, he is brought to despair of the doubt itself.<sup>14</sup>

The Eleusinian mysteries of bread and wine teach that sense certainty is not to be trusted, for in them sense-certainty’s view that reality is everlasting being falls apart as the partaker “brings about the nothingness, and in part he sees them [namely, the thing

<sup>6</sup> Robert Brandom, “Part Two: Mediating the Immediate: Consciousness and the Inferential Articulation of Determinate Empirical Conceptual Content,” in *A Spirit of Trust: A Semantic Reading of Hegel’s Phenomenology*, 2014, [http://www.pitt.edu/~brandom/spirit\\_of\\_trust\\_2014.html](http://www.pitt.edu/~brandom/spirit_of_trust_2014.html), accessed September 22, 2014, 4.

<sup>7</sup> ¶91.

<sup>8</sup> Pinkard, 20-23.

<sup>9</sup> ¶91.

<sup>10</sup> Pinkard, 24.

<sup>11</sup> ¶99.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Pinkard, 27.

<sup>14</sup> ¶109.



being eaten] do it to themselves.”<sup>15</sup> This is to say that sense-certainty, which sees being as the essence of reality, comes to see that objects which supposedly possess unchanging intrinsic being can be consumed and destroyed, consigned to nothingness, thereby leading the partaker towards despair as they “doubt the being of sensuous things.”<sup>16</sup> The Eleusinian mysteries therefore reveal the deficiencies of sense-certainty: things are not as they immediately seem, a point represented in the cultus’ view that what is going on in the cultus is not simply the eating of bread and wine, but the teaching of the secrets of death and the hope of resurrection to life.<sup>17</sup> Bread and wine are then “revealed Mysteries which teach the truth about sensuous things,” namely the inadequacy of sensuous immediacy, a fact that is so obvious for Hegel that even the animals are aware of it.<sup>18</sup>

Turning to the “Religion” chapter, it is important to note that the formation of sense-certainty, which was deconstructed through bread and wine in the first chapter, fits squarely within the category of Natural Religion. The characteristic of Natural Religion for Hegel is that it takes “religion as *immediate* . . . within it, spirit knows itself as its object in a natural, that is, immediate shape.”<sup>19</sup> Natural Religion is here in the realm of sensuous immediacy, a point seen in its conception of absolute essence in terms of objects that engage the senses directly and abstractly, such as light, plants, or animals.<sup>20</sup> The mysteries of bread and wine therefore question the “*immediate being*” of the light religion and the “pantheism” of the plant and animal religions, moving Natural Religion away from the immediacy of being and sensuality to the representational work of the artisan and eventually to the more communal ethic of the Religion of Art.<sup>21</sup>

#### THE CULTUS AND THE RELIGION OF ART

Bread and wine play a larger role in the Religion of Art, where the elements are discussed in terms of “the cultus.” The factor that distinguishes the Religion of Art from Natural Religion is spirit attaining consciousness through creative activity, as the artist is self-conscious of their work rather than producing it instinctively “like bees building their cells.”<sup>22</sup> This is to say that while the artisan of Natural Religion produces works that cannot communicate their own meaning, the artist of the Religion of Art produces works that communicate something directly to the community.<sup>23</sup> Spirit thus advances from the form of substance, as in the immediacy of Natural Religion, to that of subject

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> ¶109; Pahl, 145.

<sup>17</sup> Katrin Pahl, “The Way of Despair,” in *Hegel and the Infinite: Religion, Politics, and Dialectic*, ed. Slavoj Žižek, Clayton Crockett and Creston Davis, 141-157 (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 153.

<sup>18</sup> ¶109.

<sup>19</sup> ¶683.

<sup>20</sup> Thomas A. Lewis, “Religion and Demythologization in Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit,” in *Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit: A Critical Guide*, ed. Dean Moyal and Michael Quante, 192-209 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 197. PS ¶685-690.

<sup>21</sup> ¶688, 689.

<sup>22</sup> ¶683, ¶691, ¶699.

<sup>23</sup> Pinkard, “Autorität und Kunst-Religion,” in *Hegels Phänomenologie: Ein kooperativer Kommentar zu einem Schlüsselwerk der Moderne*, ed. Klaus Vieweg and Wolfgang Welsch (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2008), 6.

in the Religion of Art.<sup>24</sup> Within this consciousness, the cultus arises in order to resolve the tension between the "thing-like character of the statuary column," through which spirit cannot self-consciously express itself; and speech, which expresses the self-consciousness of the artist, yet is contingent and transitory.<sup>25</sup> "The movement of both sides," the objectivity of the statuary and the subjectivity of hymnody, then constitutes the cultus for Hegel.<sup>26</sup>

These two sides then come together in the cultus, as the divine being is made present in the community through sacrifice and consumption. This begins as the individual sacrifices a possession, such as an animal or bread and wine, in recognition that the divine essence and not the contingent self is of absolute value in the world.<sup>27</sup> This act of sacrifice brings about what Terry Pinkard calls a "kind of reflective unity with the essence of things" as the consumption of sacrificed elements "assimilate[s] the divine into themselves."<sup>28</sup> In practices such as the consumption of bread and wine in the cultus of Ceres and Bacchus the community sees their lives affirmed as the gods become manifest among them, as "the fruits consumed are the *living* Ceres and Bacchus *themselves*."<sup>29</sup> The cultus then in part overcomes the sharp divide between divine and human life seen in Natural Religion as the divine "essence descends through this mediation from its universality into individuality, and it thus merges with actuality."<sup>30</sup> The divine essence is thus actualized and correlated to the self-consciousness of the worshipping community.<sup>31</sup>

The issue here, however, is that spirit still deals with the issue of immediacy and abstraction. As Hegel writes, "its self-conscious life is thus merely the mystery of bread and wine, of Ceres and Bacchus, not that of the other, that is, the genuinely higher gods, whose individuality encompasses within itself self-consciousness as such as an essential moment."<sup>32</sup> This is to say that absolute spirit needs two self-consciousnesses to be reconciled through mutual recognition, a dynamic that is not at play yet.<sup>33</sup> While the community of worshippers is self-conscious and unites with absolute spirit in the mysteries, absolute spirit is not yet self-conscious: "Spirit as *self-conscious* spirit has not yet sacrificed itself to it, and the mystery of bread and wine is not yet the mystery of flesh and blood."<sup>34</sup> In short, although the cultus has made the divine essence present among the community, the divine essence is not yet self-conscious, instead remaining within the immediate realm of a thing that is sensuously "seen, felt, smelt and tasted."<sup>35</sup> Spirit, in the case of the Religion of Art, is immediate, abstract, and not self-conscious. In

<sup>24</sup> ¶748

<sup>25</sup> ¶713; Lewis, 199.

<sup>26</sup> ¶714.

<sup>27</sup> ¶718; Pinkard, *Hegel's Phenomenology*, 239.

<sup>28</sup> Pinkard, 239.

<sup>29</sup> ¶718; Pinkard 239.

<sup>30</sup> ¶716; Lewis, 199.

<sup>31</sup> Lewis, 199.

<sup>32</sup> ¶724.

<sup>33</sup> ¶666-667.

<sup>34</sup> ¶724.

<sup>35</sup> ¶722.

short, the Religion Art, by simply pointing to aesthetic solutions, cannot do the heavy lifting of fully justifying communal norms. However, this is not the last word on Spirit.

#### REVEALED RELIGION, INCARNATION, AND THE SCANDAL OF PARTICULARITY

This is overcome in Revealed Religion. In Revealed Religion, spirit becomes self-conscious and is represented in the notion of the incarnation of the divine essence.<sup>36</sup> The incarnation is the final step in a process of condescension on the part of divine essence. First, the divine essence was represented merely externally in the statuary column of the artificer in Natural Religion.<sup>37</sup> In the Religion of Art, the cultus then brought together this external aspect with the inward activity of the self.<sup>38</sup> The religion of art thus leads to the view of the self as an absolute, meaning that the individual cannot be reconciled with actuality, a point seen for Hegel in the failure of cultic festivals to appropriately express Roman communal life: “the tables of the gods are without spiritual food and drink, and consciousness does not receive back from its games and festivals the joyful unity of itself with the essence.”<sup>39</sup> This disillusionment, expressed through allusions to the cultic practice of eating, then sets the stage for the conception of spirit represented in the incarnation: namely that the divine essence and the human essence are one and the same.<sup>40</sup>

For Hegel, Christianity is the absolute religion because of its depiction of God becoming incarnate through Christ. Christ’s nature is at once fully human and fully divine. In the incarnation “God is therefore here *revealed as he is*; he *exists there* in the way that he exists *in itself*; he exists there as spirit.”<sup>41</sup> The incarnation of the absolute in a particular individual then identifies the absolute divine essence with spirit, showing that absolute spirit has been made present within the community.<sup>42</sup>

Just as in the “Sense-Certainty” chapter, here the problem of sensuous immediacy arises, and as we shall see once again the Eucharist plays an important role in overcoming this issue. The problem with the incarnation is that “this representation is in this way still *immediate* and hence not spiritual. It knows the human shape of the essence initially merely as a particular and not yet as a universal form.”<sup>43</sup> This is analogous to the “scandal of particularity” highlighted by Enlightenment philosopher Gotthold Lessing: how can the particular person of Jesus have universal significance?<sup>44</sup> Or, in Hegel’s terms, how can the universality of absolute spirit be manifest in an immediate, particular individual? This issue is overcome in part through the death Christ, as “the dead divine man, that is, the human God, is *in itself* universal self-

<sup>36</sup> ¶748; Lewis, 202.

<sup>37</sup> ¶731.

<sup>38</sup> ¶*Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> ¶753; Lewis, 201.

<sup>40</sup> Lewis, 202.

<sup>41</sup> ¶761.

<sup>42</sup> Lewis, 203

<sup>43</sup> ¶780.

<sup>44</sup> I am indebted to David Bruner for highlighting this point. See Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, “On the Proof of the Spirit and of Power,” in *Lessing’s Theological Writings*, 51-56 (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1956).



consciousness.”<sup>45</sup> With the death of Christ, spirit is no longer constrained to the particular but is allowed to move to the universal. This is to say that spirit is no longer manifest in a particular individual, but in the community itself: “spirit is therefore posited within the third element, within *universal self-consciousness*; spirit is its religious community,” thereby in part overcoming the issue of immediacy present in the incarnation.<sup>46</sup> The issue still remains for Hegel as to how it is that spirit is actualized in the community, a point at which the Eucharist is helpful.

#### THE LUTHERAN EUCHARIST: SPIRIT WITHIN THE COMMUNITY

This notion of spirit overcoming immediacy by being present within the religious community itself is represented for Hegel in the Eucharist. At this point, it is important to consider Hegel’s views of the Eucharist found in his more explicitly theological works, specifically his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*. Two points are important here. The first is that he sees the Lutheran view of the Eucharist as primarily communal. He contrasts Lutheran sacramentology with that of the Reformed and Roman Catholic traditions. On the one hand, the Reformed view is too internal and spiritual, seeing the host as primarily a memorial of remembrance. This means that in the Reformed understanding “God only exists in representation, in memory, and to this extent he does not have... immediate subjective presence.”<sup>47</sup> On the other hand, the Roman Catholic view is too external, venerating the material bread and wine as literally Christ’s body and blood, objectifying God to the point that the community cannot participate in the divine life.<sup>48</sup>

The Lutheran Eucharist mediates between these two poles, focusing on the work of the sacrament within the community itself. Whereas the Reformed experience in communion is pietistic and individual and the Catholic view is external and objectively focused on the host, the Lutheran view focuses on the communal act of partaking the elements as the point where Christ is present.<sup>49</sup> As he writes, in the Lutheran Eucharist “the subsistence of the community is completed by sharing in the appropriation of God’s presence... the community’s self-maintenance is the partaking of the presence of God.”<sup>50</sup> The importance of the Lutheran understanding of the Eucharist for Hegel is first precisely that communion is communal.

The second point is that Hegel sees the Lutheran Eucharist as uniquely able to join the abstract and the particular. As mentioned above Hegel wants to avoid the transubstantiation of Roman Catholicism and what he takes as the memorialism of the

<sup>45</sup> ¶781.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion, The Lectures of 1827*, ed. Peter C. Hodgson, trans. R.F. Brown, P.C. Hodgson and J.M. Stewart (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), 481.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 480; Lawrence S. Stepelevich, “Hegel and Roman Catholicism,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 60, no. 4 (Winter 1992): 682-683; Stephen Crites, *In the Twilight of Christendom: Hegel vs. Kierkegaard on Faith and History* (Chambersburg, PA: American Academy of Religion, 1972), 49-50.

<sup>49</sup> Hegel, 481.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 479-481.

Reformed view.<sup>51</sup> The Lutheran doctrine that Christ is really present “in and under” the bread and wine: in other words, Christ is bodily present in the elements but is not identical with them.<sup>52</sup> Because of this, in “the communion, the self-feeling presence of God comes about only insofar as the external thing is consumed—not merely physically but in spirit and in faith.”<sup>53</sup> In other words, the Lutheran view is then able to both signify and realize God’s grace as Christ is both represented in the elements and actualized in the community through the eating of bread and drinking of wine. Hegel’s view of the Eucharist is thus built on what Cyril O’Regan calls a “sacramental principle” centered on the connected *loci* of the religious community and the presence of God therein rather than a dogmatic defense of Lutheranism.<sup>54</sup>

These twin ideas of community and real presence are important for seeing how the Eucharist overcomes the problem of immediacy highlighted above—namely, how to actualize the particular incarnation of the divine essence with the universal needs of the community. Since religious symbols represent philosophical truths, we can understand that the Eucharist is the prime representative of spirit within the community. Thomas Lewis points out that the Christian doctrine of the Holy Spirit represents the presence of the absolute within the self-consciousness of the community as the cultus had in Greek religion.<sup>55</sup> However, the Eucharist is not supplanted by the Holy Spirit in this representation, but is included in it. This is to say that the death of Christ brings about the coming of the Holy Spirit, resulting in a “transcendence-in immanence” that is visually represented in the Eucharist, uniting the finite and the infinite.<sup>56</sup>

Hegel’s Lutheran sacramentology thus allows him to see Christ, the incarnation of the divine essence, as present in the elements, meaning that the communal act of partaking in the Eucharist incorporates the community into the divine essence itself, replacing the body of Christ with the body of the religious community itself.<sup>57</sup> In Lawrence S. Stepelevich’s words, the Eucharist then overcomes the immediacy of the incarnation, making the “limiting flesh” of Christ “present to all for all time” through

<sup>51</sup> It is important to note that Hegel sees Reformed sacramentology in terms of Zwingli’s memorialism, neglecting Calvin’s view of Christ’s real spiritual presence in the elements.

<sup>52</sup> Martin Luther, “Large Catechism,” in *The Book of Concord*, ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert, 371-480 (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2000), VIII 8.

<sup>53</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion, The Lectures of 1827*, ed. Peter C. Hodgson, trans. R.F. Brown, P.C. Hodgson and J.M. Stewart (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), 479-481.

<sup>54</sup> Cyril O’Regan, *The Heterodox Hegel* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994), 243; Peter C. Hodgson, *Hegel and Christian Theology: A Reading of the Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 193; Farneth, 13 n. 11.

<sup>55</sup> Lewis, 205.

<sup>56</sup> John D. Caputo, “The Perversity of the Absolute, the Perverse Core of Hegel, and the Possibility of Radical Theology,” in *Hegel and the Infinite: Religion, Politics, and Dialectic*, ed. Slavoj Žižek, Clayton Crockett and Creston Davis, 47-66 (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 56-57.; Peter Wake, *Tragedy in Hegel’s Early Theological Writings* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2014), 60-61.

<sup>57</sup> Slavoj Žižek, “Hegel and Shitting: The Idea’s Consumption,” in *Hegel and the Infinite: Religion, Politics, and Dialectic*, ed. Slavoj Žižek, Clayton Crockett and Creston Davis, 221-232 (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 221; Ann W. Astell, *Eating Beauty: The Eucharist and the Spiritual Arts of the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006), 237.

the Holy Spirit.<sup>58</sup> Alongside the Holy Spirit, the Eucharist thus entails the overcoming of the incarnation's immediacy and the presence of absolute spirit among the community.

#### THE EUCHARIST AND ABSOLUTE KNOWING

While Hegel does not explicitly cite the Eucharist in the Revealed Religion section, this understanding makes sense of Hegel's use of Eucharistic imagery to describe absolute knowing. As mentioned before, Hegel describes absolute knowing in the preface as "the bacchanalian revel where not a member is sober . . . each member is just as immediately dissolved into it."<sup>59</sup> Perhaps more striking, in the last sentences of the work Hegel writes that the movement of the forms of spirit "form the recollection and the Golgotha of absolute spirit, the actuality, the truth, and certainty of its throne, without which it would be lifeless and alone; only—Out of the chalice of this realm of spirits / Foams forth to him his infinity."<sup>60</sup> In these two examples we have references to the Greek cultus, the death of Christ—which, as discussed above brings about the coming of the Holy Spirit and paves the way for the Eucharist as communion—and the Eucharistic chalice.

Here we see that Eucharistic imagery represents spirit within the religious community, as well as absolute knowing itself. According to Molly Farneth, absolute spirit can be called "divine" because it and the absolute standard are the same.<sup>61</sup> This is to say that because the content of the referent *God* is the absolute standard of knowledge, God can be said to be identical with absolute spirit, the various social practices that ground the community's norms.<sup>62</sup> Further, as Jeffrey Stout claims, once God is understood as the absolute we can look at various Christian doctrines for what they have to say about absolute spirit.<sup>63</sup> For him, doctrines that are candidates for this status include the Trinity, the incarnation, and communal sacramental practices.<sup>64</sup>

Based on this understanding of God as the absolute standard, we can then interpret the Eucharist for what it tells us about absolute spirit. The answer is precisely that absolute spirit is communal, made manifest through the purposive social practice of partaking the sacrament. The confession that God is present in the elements expresses this as well as the identification of God with absolute spirit. In other words, the view that the Eucharist is essentially communal and that it entails the presence of God directly maps onto the Hegelian idea that absolute spirit is social and includes the absolute standard, namely God. With this in mind we can then make sense of why Hegel describes absolute knowing in terms of the Eucharist; namely, both include the presence of the absolute in the community.

<sup>58</sup> Lawrence S. Stepelevich, "Hegel and the Lutheran Eucharist," *Heythrop Journal* 27 (1986): 270.

<sup>59</sup> ¶47 in Pinkard.

<sup>60</sup> ¶808

<sup>61</sup> Molly Farneth, "Gender and the Ethical Given: Human and Divine Law in Hegel's Reading of the *Antigone*," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 41, no. 4 (2013): 663.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 663 n. 10.

<sup>63</sup> Jeffrey Stout, "What is it that Absolute Knowing Knows?" forthcoming in *Journal of Religion* 95:2 (April 2015)

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*



## CONCLUSION AND RAMIFICATIONS

Here I have shown how Hegel uses the Eucharist in the development of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, offering the interpretative claim that the Eucharist is for Hegel a rich symbol of the presence of absolute spirit in the community. By tracking Hegel's use of allusions to bread and wine in the *Phenomenology* we see that the Eucharist reveals the deficiencies of our formations of consciousness, calling us to the recognition of spirit within the community. The Eucharist first shows the deficiency of sense-certainty, bringing about the move from Natural religion to the Religion of Art. In the Religion of Art the cultus allows the divine essence to be sensuously present in the community, although it is not self-conscious. The Christian Eucharist then arises after the incarnation and death of the incarnated and self-conscious divine essence, bridging the gap between the universal and the particular and allowing absolute spirit to be manifest in the community, a point where Hegel's Lutheran understanding of the Eucharist is helpful. Finally, Hegel uses Eucharistic imagery to describe absolute knowing, showing that the Eucharist points to the presence of the absolute standard within the community. Hegel thus uses the Eucharist and related imagery throughout the *Phenomenology* to point us to the presence of the absolute within social and communal life.

Where does this leave us? I would like to conclude by suggesting two potential ramifications of this thesis. First, as shown above, this thesis helps Christian theology overcome the scandal of particularity highlighted by Lessing, moving the particular outside of itself into the universal.

Secondly, this thesis allows us to draw Hegel's sacramentology closer to contemporary metaphysically minimalist readings of Hegel that emphasize the social and normative dimensions of Hegel's thought.<sup>65</sup> As Hegel's treatment of the Eucharist shows, the communal aspect is key. Through a minimalist interpretation we can then ask how the Eucharist can function socially in the religious community. That is, if a community confesses that the absolute standard which norms their actions—namely God—is present in bread and wine, how should this impact their approach to ethics and understanding of mission? We can then look to examples such as the missional use of the Eucharist for Catholics resisting the Pinochet regime in Chile. As William T. Cavanaugh has shown, in that context the Eucharist created a “counter politics” to the politics of torture, allowing communicants to resist state sponsored torture by refusing the sacrament to known torturers and seeing the sacrament as a symbol of the tortured body of Christ that called them to protest torture.<sup>66</sup> Here we see an example of the Eucharist as purposive social practice, bringing the community closer to justice and therefore spirit. As this brief example shows, Hegel's use of the Eucharistic allusions in the *Phenomenology* points us to an understanding of the centrality of community for the advent of spirit, as well as the potential resources for thinking about mission offered to

<sup>65</sup> Farneth, 645 n. 3; Pinkard, “Hegelianism in the Twentieth Century,” *Routledge Companion to Twentieth Century Philosophy*, 118–127, ed. Dermot Moran (New York: Routledge, 2008), 145–146.

<sup>66</sup> William T. Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist: Theology, Politics, and the Body of Christ* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 205.

religious communities through practices such as the Eucharist; a sacrament which, as I have shown, is a key symbol for absolute spirit in the *Phenomenology*.

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# Lesslie Newbigin's Indian Interlocutors

## A Study in Theological Reception

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*Recognizing the recent interest in missionary theologian Lesslie Newbigin shown by European and North American scholars, this essay points to the Indian influences upon Newbigin's thought and the engagement of Indian Christians with this bishop of the Church of South India. This study gauges the reception of Newbigin's work by Indian Protestant theologians from the 1970s onward and assesses how their affirmative and critical responses have resulted in new theological, ecclesiological, or hermeneutical understandings. These thinkers include M. M. Thomas, Stanley Samartha, K. P. Aleaz, and Samuel George. The essay provides a wider view of global missiological currents and encourages theologians, missiologists, and Christian leaders to give greater consideration to world Christianity and non-Western theologies. It considers the culturally-conditioned nature of theological claims and emphasizes what Newbigin's readers might learn about Christianity, culture, and contextualization from Indian theologies of religious pluralism.*

### INTRODUCTION

Christian communities in Britain and in India fondly remember missionary theologian J. E. Lesslie Newbigin (1909-1998), and research on his life and work has increased dramatically since his death. Although Newbigin spent more than thirty years in India and was warmly received by Asian, African, and Latin American Christians in ecumenical circles, the recent discussion of his theology has been Euro-centric. Of the ten dissertations on Newbigin cited by Jeppe B. Nikolajsen in his own thesis on Newbigin's ecclesiology, all were produced in Western institutions by European or North American scholars and all center upon theology and mission in those settings.<sup>1</sup> This emphasis is understandable given the focus of Newbigin's later writings on Western society. Such missiological discussions, however, often overlook the Indian influences upon Newbigin's thought and the continuing engagement of Indian theologians with this pioneering bishop of the Church of South India (CSI). As this

<sup>1</sup> Jeppe Bach Nikolajsen, "Redefining the Identity of the Church: A Constructive Study of the Post-Christendom Theologies of Lesslie Newbigin and John Howard Yoder" (Ph.D. diss., Norwegian School of Theology, 2010), 14.

study will demonstrate, missiologists in Europe and the United States could gain significant insight by giving deeper attention to Indian theologians' engagement with Newbigin's work on the gospel in a religiously plural context.

This study gauges the reception of Newbigin's thought by Indian Protestant theologians.<sup>2</sup> Adapting William Rusch's methodology of ecumenical reception, it considers three forms of theological response. *Exogenous reception* occurs when a second partner receives an idea from the first and adapts it. *Mutual reception*, in contrast, indicates the "living power of critical dialogue that should lead to unity." For the purposes of this study, it involves dialogue between two theologians whose engagement results in mutual agreement and new theological understandings.<sup>3</sup> *Non-reception* involves declaring the non-applicability of certain outmoded expressions of faith. This process may occur as part of exogenous or mutual reception and does not require complete rejection of a theological viewpoint.<sup>4</sup> This essay identifies the exogenous reception and non-reception of Indian Christians who encountered Newbigin's thought through reading his work, listening to him speak, or personal interactions. It assesses how their affirmative or critical responses resulted in new theological, ecclesiological, or hermeneutical understandings. In separate sections of this essay I address dialogical engagement, indirect interaction, and direct reading as three different ways that Indian theologians have engaged Newbigin's work. I raise the topic of mutual reception when addressing dialogical processes of reception and in considering the extent to which Newbigin was influenced by his encounter with Indian theology and religiosity.

This essay points toward the possibilities for receiving and adapting Newbigin's theology in the non-Western world. It aims to provide a wider view of missiological currents outside Europe and North America and to encourage theologians, missiologists, and Christian leaders in the West to give greater consideration to world Christianity and non-Western theologies. Attention to Indian theologians who have engaged Newbigin will offer insight on the character and variety in Indian Protestant theology. In addition, the essay sheds light on the religiously plural Indian context that shaped Newbigin's as a missionary and ecumenical writer. For these purposes, I focus on four Indian Protestant thinkers who responded to Newbigin's thought between 1970 and 2010: Madathilparampil Mammen Thomas, Stanley Samartha, Kalarikkal Poullose Aleaz, and Samuel George.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> I focus on Protestant theologians because Newbigin's primary engagement was with the Protestant denominations that united in 1947 to form the CSI. However, Catholic and Orthodox leaders in India have also discussed Newbigin's work. Jose Kuttianimattathil, *Practice and Theology of Interreligious Dialogue: A Critical Study of the Indian Attempts since Vatican II* (Bangalore: Kristu Jyoti Publications, 1995). Anastasios Yannoulatos, et al. "In Tribute to Bishop Lesslie Newbigin," *International Review of Mission* 79, no. 313 (1990): 86-101.

<sup>3</sup> William G. Rusch, *Reception: An Ecumenical Opportunity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 19.

<sup>4</sup> William G. Rusch, *Ecumenical Reception: Its Challenge and Opportunity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 78.

<sup>5</sup> While this essay centers upon Indian Christians' theological engagement with Newbigin, it is also important to recognize the general esteem Newbigin received members of the CSI and other Indian Christian communities. Tributes and biographical references highlight Newbigin's fluency in Tamil, his engagement with Hindu scholars, his promotion of Dalit leadership, and the guidance he provided to younger pastors.

## 1. DIALOGICAL ENGAGEMENT WITH NEWBIGIN

The discussion between Newbigin and M. M. Thomas in the early 1970s is the most well-documented instance of an Indian theologian's reception of Newbigin. This published exchange began with Thomas' references to Newbigin in his 1971 book *Salvation and Humanisation* and Newbigin's subsequent review of the book.<sup>6</sup> Their engagement continued in a series of letters published in 1972. Sebastian Kim and George Hunsberger have offered detailed treatments of this exchange, so I revisit the subject only to set the stage for later Indian engagement with Newbigin's work. Thomas' sophisticated interaction with Newbigin's thought on ecclesiology and conversion is significant because of Thomas' prominence as an international ecumenical leader and the most prolific Indian Protestant theologian writing in the twentieth century.<sup>7</sup> As Hunsberger's interpretation of the exchange centers on Newbigin's arguments and Kim's essay seeks to balance between the two thinkers, I focus on Thomas' points of agreement and disagreement with Newbigin.

The Thomas-Newbigin exchange is framed by the mutual respect and friendship that developed between the two men because of their shared concern for evangelism and missiological reflection in the Indian context and their involvements with the Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society in Bangalore.<sup>8</sup> Paying tribute to Newbigin years later for his stimulating writing and constant dialogue, Thomas wrote, "I agree so much with him on Christian fundamentals that I have to find proper reasons for differing from him on many issues".<sup>9</sup> His thorough engagement with Newbigin's ideas is apparent in his response to Newbigin's review, in which Thomas tells the bishop, "you know I am a regular reader of all that you write."<sup>10</sup> In *Salvation and Humanisation*, after using Newbigin to support a number of his points, Thomas recalls a theological conversation that began when Newbigin challenged Thomas' concern for communicating the gospel to "modern secular man." Thomas explains why this particular focus is necessary even though the gospel is already relevant to all humanity:

P.M. Gnanadurai, *Bishop Lesslie Newbigin: A Biography* (Chennai: Christian Literature Society, 2009). Israel Selvanayagam, "Toward a Humanist Theology of Religious Harmony," in *Many Voices in Christian Mission Essays in honour of J. E. Lesslie Newbigin*, eds. T. Dayanandan Francis and Israel Selvanayagam (Madras: The Christian Literature Society, 1994). An interesting contrast also emerges between the work of Lesslie Newbigin's first biographer, George Wainwright, who frames Newbigin's experience in India as one chapter in his personal history and P. M. Gnanadurai, an Indian pastor whose 2009 biography conveys how deeply entwined the Newbigin's life was in the history and identity of the CSI. Geoffrey Wainwright, *Lesslie Newbigin: A Theological Life* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2000). Gnanadurai, *Bishop Lesslie Newbigin*.

<sup>6</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, "Salvation and Humanisation—Book Review," *Religion and Society* 18, no. 1 (March 1971): 71-80.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas was a member of the Mar Thoma Syrian Church, a theologically Reformed denomination. Sathianathan Clarke, "M. M. Thomas," in *Empire: The Christian Tradition – New Readings of Classical Theologians*, eds. Kwok Pui-lan, Donald H. Compier, and Joerg Rieger (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 423.

<sup>8</sup> George Hunsberger, "Conversion and Community: Revisiting the Lesslie Newbigin—M.M. Thomas Debate," *The International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 22, no. 3 (July 1998): 112.

<sup>9</sup> M.M. Thomas, "In Tribute to Bishop Lesslie Newbigin," *International Review of Mission* 79, no. 313 (1990): 97.

<sup>10</sup> M.M. Thomas, "Baptism, the Church and Koinonia," *Religion and Society* 19, no. 1 (March 1972): 72.



I appreciate the theological point the Bishop is making, but I must confess I have no sympathy with a universalism and Biblicism of this kind. For two reasons. *First*, it conceives God and human nature in too static terms and assumes that no new dimensions of human existence or divine purpose have emerged in the modern world, through the acts of the living God in the past and the attempts of men to recreate their environment of nature and society and to formulate new goals for mankind... *Secondly*, while I believe the biblical realities are basic, I cannot consider the biblical categories and form of language as universally intelligible enough to modern secular man, without translation and some creative updating in terms of the language and the categories of the secular man (Thomas 1971:46-47).<sup>11</sup>

This response is a helpful entry point into Thomas' conception of a "Christ-centered secular fellowship," around which his main disagreement with Newbigin revolves. Building on his earlier statement that "the religious fellowship within the church and the human fellowship in secular society are both within the reality of Christ and the history of salvation in the world," Thomas clarifies his position in his first letter to Newbigin.<sup>12</sup> He agrees with Newbigin that Christ-centeredness is the essence of faith and that there can be no "disembodied" church, but he goes on to argue that the new humanity in Christ transcends the church. While Thomas believes Newbigin would acknowledge this point, he writes, "you never take that wider reality seriously in any of your theology of the idea and form of the Church. Indeed you seem to think that Church is the 'substitute' for the New Humanity. This is probably the crucial issue of difference between us in our understanding of the Church."<sup>13</sup>

In contrast to Newbigin's insistence on the *visible* fellowship of Christ's followers in the church, Thomas believes that in the Hindu context "conversion to Christ does not necessarily imply conversion to the Christian community" in isolation of the communities in which the converts live. By remaining socially, culturally, and religiously part of the Hindu community, such Christ-centered fellowships of faith can transform their communities from within. Thomas is also more willing than Newbigin to make room for these emerging fellowships in the universal church, even if they neglect the sacrament of baptism.<sup>14</sup> He upholds this view in his second letter in response to Newbigin's objection to the necessity of a Hindu religious community within which a Christian community might exist. Thomas clarifies that he advocates a "secular" society in the sense that it is "not controlled by any religions but within which all religions can build their fellowships of faith." He views secularization in India as a positive movement that will enable Christians to transform India's social and religious practices in light of Christ, even if many of its cultural aspects remain Hindu.<sup>15</sup> Stressing his contrasting view of secularism, Thomas says at the end of his second letter to Newbigin:

<sup>11</sup> M.M. Thomas, *Salvation and Humanisation: Some Crucial Issues of the Theology of Mission in Contemporary India* (Madras, India: Christian Literature Society, 1971), 46-47.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>13</sup> M.M. Thomas, "Baptism, the Church and *Koinonia*," 70-72.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 73-75.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 88-89.

I think you have been a little too unfair to the secularists who, breaking through the law-and-ideology approach of dogmatic secular humanism are acknowledging Jesus as the reality of the transcendent criterion and resource for humanization, but who cannot acknowledge Him in the traditional religious terms as 'Lord and Saviour'. Here, it seems to me, we need a new definition of the 'substance' of what it is to acknowledge Christ Jesus as Lord and Saviour. Hans Kung's idea that acknowledgement of Jesus means Jesus being accepted as 'decisive for one's life', may be helpful here to bring out the substance behind the religious terms. And in this light, probably, there is more substantial acknowledgement of Jesus as Lord among secularists than you have given credit for.<sup>16</sup>

While Thomas and Newbigin continued to interact with one another as friends and fellow theologians after the 1970s, their mutual engagement was never again sustained in the same manner as in this published debate.<sup>17</sup> Over the next few decades, Thomas' thought shifted from his earlier reliance on the neo-orthodoxy of Karl Barth and Emil Brunner.<sup>18</sup> By 1987, in his book *Risking Christ for Christ's Sake*, Thomas had embraced Indian theologians Raimon Pannikar and Paul Devanandan's views of Christianity "as the sign of the kingdom and the fermenting leaven in the universe of faiths bringing them to the transforming knowledge of the universal presence of the Christ of God." This later work recognizes Christ as more than Jesus of Nazareth and his people as more than the "historical community of those openly acknowledging Jesus as God and Saviour."<sup>19</sup> Thomas' comments on Newbigin in this volume and his review of Newbigin's *The Other Side* of 1984 demonstrate the development in his thought and confirm their disagreement on ecclesiology, conversion, and secularism.

In the book review, Thomas affirms the Newbigin's hope that Christians will shed their fear of politics and begin witnessing to modern culture. He then raises various points of clarification when "looking at Newbigin's presentation from an Asian angle." First, in contrast to Newbigin's view that Christian dogma could provide a common framework for interfaith cooperation in Britain, he proposes a Christian anthropology that allows "open secularism."<sup>20</sup> Second, Thomas believes that Newbigin's discussion of eschatology, history, and politics stresses eschatology so strongly that it verges on "a social pietism in which political struggles cannot be taken seriously." For Thomas, eschatological and historical hopes must be aligned. Thomas' final comment on Newbigin's "characterization of faith as 'primary' and critical faculty as 'secondary'" is taken up more fully in *Risking Christ for Christ's Sake*, where he discusses Newbigin's conflict with pluralist John Hick.<sup>21</sup> In contrast to Hick's view that Christians must not

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>17</sup> In 1996 Thomas accused Newbigin of turning from his earlier support for a secular society. Geoffrey Wainwright describes Newbigin's initial interest and his growing disillusionment with secular theology. Considering the different understandings of the concept "secularism" in India and the West, Wainwright believes this is more of a geographical shift than a chronological one. Wainwright, *Lesslie Newbigin*, 353-354.

<sup>18</sup> Sathianathan Clarke, "M. M. Thomas," 424, 436.

<sup>19</sup> In this Thomas provides an extended commentary on the "Barth-Brunner-Kraemer interpretation of Revelation over against Religion." M.M. Thomas, *Risking Christ for Christ's Sake: Towards an Ecumenical Theology of Pluralism* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1987), 49-69, 113-114.

<sup>20</sup> M.M. Thomas, "Mission and Modern Culture," *Ecumenical Review* 36, no. 3 (July 1984): 319.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 320-321.

ground their approach to inter-religious relations in a faith-commitment to Christ, Newbigin argues that no religious or secular starting point is neutral. Thomas agrees that everyone has an underlying faith-commitment but he also contends, "every faith-commitment must reckon with the penultimate commitments or concerns of the common humanity which we share with others." This statement signifies that Christian theology involves putting one's faith in Christ alongside other faiths, rationality, and shared human values, in the process of which Christians "risk Christ for Christ's sake."<sup>22</sup> Although the shift in Thomas' viewpoint is apparent in his later works, some Indian theologians believe that he did not move far enough in questioning the influence of Western culture and theology upon Indian Christianity.<sup>23</sup> In this regard, Thomas' perspectives on history and the person of Christ remain closer to Newbigin's views than do the Christological approaches of later Indian theologians.

## 2. INDIRECT ENGAGEMENT

Newbigin's indirect interpreters are those Indian theologians who were familiar with Newbigin's theology and came in contact with him in India and in the World Council of Churches (WCC) but do not refer to him directly in their work. I will focus primarily upon Stanley Samartha, a leader in the WCC and the director of its first sub-unit on dialogue with other faiths, because of his status as an ecumenical leader and his influence upon other Indian theologians, including those I treat in Section 3 as Newbigin's "direct readers." Newbigin mentions Samartha in his later work but does not make a concerted effort to engage him in the way he did M. M. Thomas.<sup>24</sup> While there is a mutual lack of reception in the case of Samartha and Newbigin, both take up issues of Christology and religious pluralism and make implicit references to each other. In this section, therefore, I put Samartha's work in conversation with Newbigin's approach to pluralism to demonstrate their common commitments and areas of disagreement.

Stanley Samartha is representative of a generation of Indian theologians after Newbigin who took issue with Western missionary interpretations of religion and culture, particularly those voiced by Hendrik Kraemer at the World Missionary Conference in Tambaram in 1938.<sup>25</sup> Expanding upon the views of earlier Indian theologians involved in Pandipeddi Chenchiah's "Rethinking Group," Samartha is open to the possibility of God's revelation coming to people through world religions. Having rejected Kraemer's view on this matter, they do not recognize Newbigin as a sufficient alternative to the missionary perspective voiced at Tambaram.

Samartha and Newbigin differ, first, in their perspectives on the religions. Newbigin rejects religious pluralism in the name of Jesus as "the unique and decisive revelation of

<sup>22</sup> Thomas, *Risking Christ for Christ's Sake*, 5.

<sup>23</sup> Clarke, "M. M. Thomas," 430.

<sup>24</sup> By the time Newbigin had moved back to England, his attention was aimed more toward Western advocates of religious pluralism, but he includes Samartha among scholars like Diana Eck, John Hick, and Paul Knitter. Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 156.

<sup>25</sup> Hendrik Kraemer, *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World* (London: Edinburgh House Press, 1938).



God for the salvation of the world.”<sup>26</sup> Jesus is the Logos who came into the world to shine into the darkness, and the Gospel of John suggests that religion is the “primary area of darkness” because it was not the religious leaders but the unlearned people who responded to the light.<sup>27</sup> Even before reading Karl Barth’s argument that “religion is unbelief,” Newbigin’s experiences with Hindu friends led him to believe that the gospel’s main point of contact was within the secular areas of human society.<sup>28</sup> Christians share in the common human tendency to cut themselves off from God “in the name of all that is best in the moral and spiritual experience of the race.” Therefore, against the claims of all religions, including Christianity, Newbigin insists that religion is not the means to salvation. With regard to the question of salvation, Newbigin believes his theology of religions both incorporates and defies the three standard categories of exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism.<sup>29</sup>

Samartha addresses the same concern as he responds to arguments similar to those Newbigin makes. He introduces *One Christ – Many Religions*, his basic text relating Christology to religious pluralism, by saying:

The conviction underlying this work is that in a religiously plural world a christology that is biblically sound, spiritually satisfying, theologically credible, and pastorally helpful is both necessary and possible without making exclusive claims for Christianity or passing negative judgments on the faiths of our neighbors.<sup>30</sup>

Rejecting both exclusivism and inclusivism, Samartha calls for the theological recognition of “Mystery,” which will enable meaningful relationships between religious communities. This new theology of religions would make room for the “powerful presence of other religions,” which he believes is missing in imported Western theologies.<sup>31</sup> Samartha commends the open-endedness of Asian religious traditions and draws especially from the Hindu Avaita “vision of a grand unity” that has enabled the cultural life in India to hold together diverse languages, ethnic groups, religions, and political ideologies.<sup>32</sup> By recognizing value in other religions, affirming Chenchiah’s position that God deals with humans through these traditions, and incorporating insight

<sup>26</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 171.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 173. Lesslie Newbigin, “Christ and the World of Religions,” *Churchman* 97 (1983): 22.

<sup>28</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *Unfinished Agenda: Autobiography* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 58.

<sup>29</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission*, revised edition (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 176-177. Newbigin writes, “The position which I have outlined is exclusivist in the sense that it affirms the unique truth of the revelation in Jesus Christ, but it is not exclusivist in the sense of denying the possibility of the salvation of the non-Christian. It is inclusivist in the sense that it refuses to limit the saving grace of God to the members of the Christian Church, but it rejects the inclusivism which regards the non-Christian religions as vehicles of salvation. It is pluralist in the sense of acknowledging the gracious work of God in the lives of all human beings, but it rejects a pluralism which denies the uniqueness and decisiveness of what God has done in Jesus Christ.” Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 182-183.

<sup>30</sup> S.J. Samartha, *One Christ—Many Religions: Toward a Revised Christology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), ix.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 98, 102.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 116-117, 120, 124, 149-150.

from non-Christian faiths into Christian theology, Samartha stands firmly against Newbigin's view that religions are not vehicles for salvation.<sup>33</sup>

Samartha and Newbigin's theologies of religion are closely tied to a second important distinction in their Christological approaches. Even though he affirms the signs of God's grace and the Holy Spirit working within the lives of non-Christians, Newbigin's view of Christ as "the clue to history" informs his assertion that the "work of the Spirit does not lead past, or beyond, or away from Jesus."<sup>34</sup> Because of this argument, Kirsteen Kim holds that the basic difference between Newbigin and Samartha is one of Logos Christology paired against spirit Christology. She writes:

Samartha often refers to God as Mystery in order to say that God is greater than human understanding and though Jesus is the Revealer of God, there is room for other revelations. Whereas Newbigin stresses the fullness of the revelation in Jesus Christ which has made known what was unknown. The two therefore reach an impasse, although both affirm that truth is one and both confess Jesus Christ as source of truth.<sup>35</sup>

Kim's analysis holds true for Samartha's attempt to maintain the distinctiveness and Lordship of Christ without stressing that Jesus is God. Challenging what he views as a Western-type "helicopter" Christology that emphasizes Christ's deity, he advocates a "bullock-cart" Christology from below that accounts for India's multi-religious context. He wrote *One Christ – Many Religions*, in part, for Christians who are "so bound to traditional christologies... so certain about the exclusive uniqueness of Christ," and so committed to a type of missionary proclamation that aims to replace other religions that they reject any revision of inherited Christologies. Samartha exhibits theological non-reception when he calls for a revision "not in the *substance* of the Christian faith but in *formulations* inherited from a previous era and a different culture."<sup>36</sup> He advocates a theocentric, Mystery-centered Christology that neither elevates Jesus to the status of God nor limits him to the human Jesus of Nazareth. This approach follows the biblical priority of God over Christomonism and retains the Mystery and distinctiveness of Christ without a negative attitude toward other faiths.<sup>37</sup> Citing a number of Western biblical scholars, Samartha argues that this Christological revision is justified biblically because of the diversity of acceptable Christologies in the New Testament and because the truth of Christ is larger than the biblical testimonies of him.<sup>38</sup> He calls for Christological flexibility and plurality, asserting, "Christian commitment however is not

<sup>33</sup> Samartha is not considered the theological counter-balance to Newbigin but to Kraemer. The honorary doctorate awarded to Samartha by Utrecht University fifty years after Tambaram, to parallel the same Dutch degree bestowed on Kraemer, adds to the characterization of Samartha and Kraemer as "two adverse brothers." J. A. B. Jongeneel, "Hendrik Kraemer and Stanley J. Samartha, two adverse brothers," *Bangalore Theological Forum* 21, no. 2 (June 1989): 3-15.

<sup>34</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *The Light Has Come: An Exposition of the Fourth Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 216-271.

<sup>35</sup> Kirsteen Kim, "The Holy Spirit in Mission in India: Indian Contribution to Contemporary Mission Pneumatology" (paper presented at the Oxford Center for Mission Studies, England, April 6, 2004): 2.

<sup>36</sup> Samartha, *One Christ—Many Religions*, x-xii, 132.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 99-101.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

to particular christologies, but to God in and through Jesus Christ."<sup>39</sup> Suggesting that the various testimonies about Christ are stronger when held together, he nevertheless does not accept all Christologies as equally valid. In a veiled reference, perhaps, to Newbigin's *Foolishness to the Greeks*, Samartha writes that while the cross might have been foolishness to the Greeks, in India it is an inspiration for non-violence. He continues:

What is foolishness, and what is a stumbling block to neighbors of other faiths is the Christian claim that *only* in Jesus Christ God has revealed God's self *once-for-all* to redeem humanity. This claim has isolated Christians from their neighbors of other faiths in India, led to their theological alienation and spiritual impoverishment, and in a religiously plural society has made it difficult, if not impossible, for Christians to co-operate with their neighbors for common purposes in society.<sup>40</sup>

Thus, Samartha's sensitivity to a context of religious plurality guides his Christological views, while Newbigin's Christology leads to view of the religions.

A final divergence between Samartha and Newbigin emerges in their approaches to culture. For Newbigin, the gospel is communicated in the language and thought forms of a particular culture, but it also challenges and transforms culture. He asserts, "Human culture is simply the way in which human societies order their corporate life, and as such it is corrupted by sin."<sup>41</sup> This has a bearing on Newbigin's approach to mission, which he considers as "a matter of preaching and teaching but also of learning," because as the Spirit bears witness to the world it will also convict and convert Christ's disciples.<sup>42</sup> Similarly, he recognizes that in inter-religious dialogue the Christian partner will risk judgment and conversion as part of his or her obedient witness to Christ.<sup>43</sup> In contrast, Samartha characterizes any attempt to change a people's heritage as an attack on the freedom of the human spirit. He believes, "Every single culture represents a unique and irreplaceable body of values through which people assert their identity and demonstrate their presence in the world... To reject, exploit, patronize, or dominate other religions and cultures is a form of injustice that needs to be set right."<sup>44</sup> He applies this reasoning both to world economic systems that impose an alien culture and to Western missions, which have applied hegemonic judgments against world religions that provide "spiritual sustenance, theological direction and ethical guidance to millions."<sup>45</sup> For Samartha, Christian mission entails approaching religious and cultural plurality with hope rather than fear or confrontation. He claims, "In a religiously plural world the mission of the church is not to make other people Christian but to invite people to enter the kingdom of God." Samartha clarifies this statement when he defines the content of mission as social justice, service of the poor,

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.

<sup>41</sup> Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 185.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

<sup>43</sup> Newbigin, *The Open Secret*, 168, 182.

<sup>44</sup> Samartha, *One Christ—Many Religions*, 41.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.



joining with other faiths to deepen the pool of human values, and pastorally equipping the church for this mission.<sup>46</sup> While these match some of Newbigin's missionary concerns, his focus on evangelistic preaching of the gospel is notably absent from Samartha's discussion. Samartha's approach to dialogue similarly rejects any evangelistic purpose in the interest of achieving harmony with neighbors of other faiths.<sup>47</sup> Instead, the Indian theologian represents the view that throughout Asia, "religion and culture are inextricably bound together... Religion is the substance of culture and culture the form of religion. If religions are the responses to the Mystery of Life, cultures are expressions of those responses not only through words and ideas, but also through symbol and sound and color."<sup>48</sup> Other Indian Protestant theologians corroborate Samartha's view and indicate a sense of unease with Newbigin's Western approach to the distinction between religion and culture.<sup>49</sup>

### 3. NEWBIGIN'S DIRECT READERS

While some Indian theologians have not viewed Newbigin as a useful resource, others have followed Thomas' example by reading and engaging directly with Newbigin's ideas. This section focuses on the ways two contemporary Indian theologians have received Newbigin's work and either critiqued it or incorporated it into their own writing. It demonstrates the range of Indian responses to Newbigin's work by examining the thought of K. P. Aleaz, a well-known author on Indian philosophy and theology, and Samuel George, a younger evangelical theologian.<sup>50</sup>

In his essay on Newbigin, Aleaz demonstrates familiarity with Newbigin's bibliography and an understanding of the bishop's essential arguments. Despite his extensive footnoting of Newbigin's books and articles, in his essay entitled "The Gospel According to Lesslie Newbigin," the Indian theologian does not show concerted engagement with Newbigin's ideas. Rather, he spends the majority of the article summarizing Newbigin's work without making positive or critical commentary. Aleaz's perspective emerges at the end of the summary when he equates Newbigin's conclusions about Hinduism with those of Hendrik Kraemer, claims that in Madurai Newbigin acted as an exclusivist missionary, and asserts that as International Missionary

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 171-174.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 15-18.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>49</sup> See, for example, the work of Paul David Devanandan (1901-1962, one of Newbigin's Indian colleagues), Israel Selvanayagam, and Sathianathan Clarke. Bob Robinson, "Lesslie Newbigin and the Christian-Hindu Encounter: A Principled Ambivalence," *Studies in World Christianity* 8, (2002): 299-302. Sathianathan Clarke, "Re-Imaging the Death of Jesus: An Indian Inter-cultural and Inter-religious Theology of the Cross," in *News of Boundless Riches: Interrogating, Comparing, and Reconstructing Mission in a Global Era*, vol. 2, eds. Lalsangkima Pachau and Max L. Stackhouse (Delhi: ISPCK, 2007). Israel Selvanayagam, "Toward a Humanist Theology of Religious Harmony," in *Many Voices in Christian Mission Essays in honour of J. E. Lesslie Newbigin*, eds. T. Dayanandan Francis and Israel Selvanayagam (Madras: The Christian Literature Society, 1994), 175, 181-182, 189, 202.

<sup>50</sup> Aleaz is Professor of Religions at Bishop's College, Calcutta. George is Principal of Master's College of Theology (Serampore University).

Council secretary Newbigin provided a negative assessment of Hinduism.<sup>51</sup> Aleaz's final evaluation of Newbigin's work is an example of theological non-reception as he replaces Newbigin's ideas with his own without recognizing much of value in Newbigin's writings that Indian theology could build upon. To Newbigin's convictions about the finality of Christ's atoning work, he responds that all of Jesus' followers need not emphasize incarnation and atonement, which are meaningless for Indians. In this context, rather, the Avaita Vedantic conception of Jesus is more appropriate. Aleaz explains, "The suggestion is that there is a possibility of interpreting the function of Jesus so as to represent the all-pervasive (*sarvagatavain*), illuminative (*jyotih*) and unifying (*ekikrtya*) power of the Supreme Atman."<sup>52</sup>

Secondly, Aleaz believes Newbigin dichotomizes the gospel and culture with the claim that the gospel converts culture. This prohibits varying perspectives on Jesus from different cultures and ignores hermeneutical attention to context.<sup>53</sup> Third, Aleaz locates Newbigin in the exclusivist camp because he does not allow for the presence of God's revelation in other religions. In contrast, Aleaz advocates a vision of Pluralistic Inclusivism in which other faiths contribute to the revelation of God in Jesus. He explains, "Here pluralism transforms itself to focus on its centre, which is God as God in the universally conceived Jesus and inclusivism transforms itself to bear witness to the fulfillment of the theological and spiritual content of Christian faith in and through the contributions of other living faiths." Finally, Aleaz considers Newbigin's version of dialogue to be, in actuality, a monologue because he refuses to accept anything from other faiths and only offers a Western cultural gospel. When dialogue is limited to Christian witness, Aleaz contends, this negates God's presence in people of other faiths and becomes a way of "continuing the colonial mission agenda of a 'sectarian gospel.'"<sup>54</sup> Putting Newbigin's approach on par with that of Hendrik Kraemer, Aleaz does not recognize Newbigin's efforts to be simultaneously exclusivist, inclusivist, and pluralist.<sup>55</sup>

Coming from an evangelical, Pentecostal background, Samuel George approaches Newbigin in a more appreciative manner while also exercising critical judgment. He is aided in this endeavor by the writings of Thomas, Samarth, Aleaz, and Christopher Duraisingh. While George's treatment of Newbigin in his Master's thesis and a more recent article reflects a younger scholar's ongoing development of missiological convictions, his work is also a solid example of exogenous reception. George takes

<sup>51</sup> K. P. Aleaz, "The Gospel According to Lesslie Newbigin: An Evaluation," *Asia Journal of Theology* 8, no. 1 (April 1999): 187-188.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 192-193.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 193.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 195-196.

<sup>55</sup> Aleaz revisits this theme in a chapter he contributed to *A Scandalous Prophet: The Way of Mission after Newbigin*. Here he argues that "a globalized gospel may have to be envisaged as five hundred years old, as old as colonialism, and that the gospel according to Lesslie Newbigin is only a twentieth-century manifestation of it." This essay focuses little on Newbigin's work, but argues for a reformulation of Newbigin's gospel, which avoids "Christocentric universalism." K. P. Aleaz, "The Globalization of Poverty and the Exploitation of the Gospel," in *A Scandalous Prophet: The Way of Mission after Newbigin*, eds. Thomas F. Foust, George R. Hunsberger, J. Andrew Kirk, and Werner Ustorf (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 165-173.

Newbigin's arguments about the gospel as public truth seriously but, after expressing anxiety about Newbigin's perspective on non-Christian faiths, he also aims to "reread" Newbigin's theology in light of the pluralist context in India.<sup>56</sup> George's work affirms Newbigin's confidence in the gospel and his concern for the divide between evangelicals and liberals, while also asserting that a Christology from the Indian soil is needed in place of Newbigin's classical Christology. In the religiously plural context of India, the message of the gospel must be shared but not imposed upon others. In his thesis, George views Newbigin's version of "risk-taking dialogue" as inadequate because it maintains the absolute uniqueness of Christ and does not challenge Kraemer's model of "subversive fulfillment," in which Christ both fulfills and contradicts the longings of all humankind.<sup>57</sup> The later journal article does not include this critique but instead affirms Newbigin's contention that the Holy Spirit is the one who converts.<sup>58</sup>

In both documents, George accepts Newbigin's premise that the gospel of Jesus Christ is public truth to be shared with others. He questions, however, Newbigin's Enlightenment critique and his Christendom-like claim the gospel could be the basis of a pluralist society. He then proposes a more relevant method for "gospelizing" in India's religiously plural context, advocating a new hermeneutics that makes the gospel both "genuinely Christian and authentically Indian."<sup>59</sup> This new hermeneutics of the gospel includes the following points: 1). The gospel must be presented in the language of the hearer while simultaneously calling "into question the worldview that shapes that language;" 2). The gospel must be interiorized so that it transforms society from within; 3). A new hermeneutical quest must take into account India's spiritual heritage, religious plurality, cultural diversity, modern secular trends, and the prevalence of poverty in the country; 4). Indian theology must interact with the "religio-cultural factors of the nation" and locate the human being in "the larger context of the cosmic order;" 5). Religious truths must be viewed not as propositional but as culturally and historically bound.<sup>60</sup> The first two of these points, at least, show how George has drawn on Newbigin's work. As he moves to his sixth and final point, he brings Newbigin back into his analysis, saying:

In India what is needed is not a "bulldozed public truth" but a creative living out of the gospel of Jesus Christ which will take into account the realities of the given context while remaining faithful to the gospel truth. Newbigin's method of gospelizing in a cross-cultural context is such an attempt to take seriously the cultural / religious aspects and to be faithful to

<sup>56</sup> George's 2010 article in the *Journal of Asian Mission* is a condensed version of this thesis, which reveals some refining of his thought on the same subject matter. Samuel George, "An Evaluation of Lesslie Newbigin's Understanding of 'The Gospel as Public Truth' in the Religiously Plural Context of India" (MA thesis, Serampore College, 2003), 1.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 66, 87.

<sup>58</sup> Samuel George, "Lesslie Newbigin's 'the Gospel as Public Truth' in a Religiously Plural Context: An Indian Missiological Evaluation," *Journal of Asian Mission* 12, no. 2 (September 2010): 206-207.

<sup>59</sup> George, "An Evaluation of Lesslie Newbigin's Understanding," 99. George, "Lesslie Newbigin's 'the Gospel as Public Truth,'" 211.

<sup>60</sup> George, "An Evaluation of Lesslie Newbigin's Understanding," 99-100. George, "Lesslie Newbigin's 'the Gospel as Public Truth,'" 210-211.



the gospel. His picture of gospel as a “subversive agent” is apt in such a situation. It probes and interrogates the false ideologies rampant in society.<sup>61</sup>

George’s work is not the constructive theology of a seasoned scholar like Aleaz, but readers may gain insight from his vacillation between affirmative reception and uneasiness as he grapples with Newbigin’s theology in the Indian context.<sup>62</sup> George also notes some unique points in Newbigin’s thought that Aleaz and Samarth do not appreciate, including Newbigin’s emphasis on the Holy Spirit as the one who convicts the world of sin and the fact that the Christian dialogue partner may be converted through the encounter.<sup>63</sup> Recognizing the influence of India upon Newbigin and the relevance of his writing for the Indian context, George points to the potential for further theological work that would hold Newbigin’s approach to religious plurality in tension with that of Thomas, Aleaz, and Samarth. Such an attempt might supplement Newbigin’s theology with insight from Indian theologians while also challenging Indian Christians to take Newbigin’s views seriously as more than a Westernized version of truth.

#### CONCLUSION

This study of Indian theologians’ engagement with Newbigin through personal dialogue, indirect interpretation, and direct reading has led to the following conclusions: 1). While largely unnoticed by Western missiologists, the continued engagement of Indian theologians with Newbigin’s work indicates not only his influence upon Indian Christianity but also the relevance of his writing about Western pluralism for the Indian context. This relevance is further evidence of the impact that the religious context of India had upon Newbigin’s thought even after he left the mission field. 2). The majority of theologians surveyed here share Newbigin’s theological interests and his commitment to the Christian church in a way that his Western pluralist interlocutors, like John Hick, did not. Nevertheless, those Indian theologians who have received Newbigin’s work most appreciatively still critique his views on the revelatory value of the religions, the meaning of Christ in a pluralistic context, and the necessity of a convert’s entry into the visible Christian community. 3) These distinctions in theology of religions, Christology, and ecclesiology relate to the greatest point of division between Newbigin and Indian theologians regarding gospel hermeneutics. Aleaz and Samarth approach the idea of a gospel-culture distinction as a Westernized version of the gospel that could never take root in Indian soil. Thomas and George also maintain that the Christian message in India must convey the value of their nation’s cultural heritage. These writers all view the connection between culture and Indian religious traditions as stronger and more unyielding than Newbigin has recognized.

<sup>61</sup> George, “An Evaluation of Lesslie Newbigin’s Understanding,” 100. George, “Lesslie Newbigin’s ‘the Gospel as Public Truth,’” 212.

<sup>62</sup> A more developed parallel from a Sri Lankan scholar may be found in Vinoth Ramachandra’s book *The Recovery of Mission*, which offers an in-depth critique of Samarth’s theology and endorses Newbigin’s critique of modernity while also showing certain weaknesses in Newbigin’s theology. Vinoth Ramachandra, *The Recovery of Mission: Beyond the Pluralist Paradigm* (Carlisle, Cumbria, UK: Paternoster Press, 1996).

<sup>63</sup> George, “An Evaluation of Lesslie Newbigin’s Understanding,” 85.

This third point warrants further consideration in light of this essay's purpose to recognize Indian contributions to the discussion of Newbigin's legacy. First, the divergence between Indian theologians and Newbigin on the relationship of the gospel, religion, and culture should not be viewed simplistically as an East-West divide. The mutual interpenetration of Western and Indian worldviews is apparent in Newbigin's immersion in the Indian context and Indian theologians' use of Western scholarship to uphold their claims. Newbigin's Euro-centric theological outlook cannot be discounted. Further, his status as a British missionary after India's independence and the power he gained as a bishop had a bearing on his reception by a generation of Indian theologians engaged in reflection on their own colonial history. Paulos Mar Gregorios of the Mar Thoma Church expresses this sense directly when he writes of Newbigin, "He came from the missionary empire of the western church, and from the nation of my colonial masters... Sometimes I felt he was treating me with a kind of paternalistic condescension, which he must have acquired in my country, living with doting Christian disciples."<sup>64</sup> This association of Newbigin with missionary paternalism may have discouraged some Indian theologians from more serious engagement with his thought. The same might be said of these theologians' assumptions about Newbigin's theological affinity with Hendrik Kraemer, against whom most of their theologies of religion are aimed.

Second, Newbigin exhibited a similar tendency for theological non-reception when it came to younger theologians like Stanley Samartha. Newbigin's admirers should not overlook the impact of his own cultural and theological background when seeking to explain his failure to appreciate newer developments in Indian theology. In his autobiography, Newbigin openly admitted the cultural sins he had committed as a missionary, as he reflected, "I have been compelled to remember the many failures in the simple courage that is needed for faithful witness, and the many ways in which – as a missionary – I failed in the sensitivity that is needed to understand another culture."<sup>65</sup> Such recognition could lead to a more balanced understanding of Newbigin's position as a missionary navigating the worlds of Western theology, Indian Christianity, and Hindu culture. Bob Robinson indicates that Newbigin's later reluctance to vigorously engage the Hindu world is related to his lack of attention to the work of Indian theologians who showed increasing concern for Hindu-Christian dialogue and the contextualization of Indian theology within the larger Hindu culture. This timidity regarding contextualization has also contributed to Indian misgivings about Newbigin, since "one of the principal reasons for the advocacy of dialogue in India has been the need for such contextualisation in order to move towards an Indian theology and an inculturated church."<sup>66</sup> In the view of Indian theologians, as interpreted by Robinson, Newbigin gave insufficient attention to context and did not incorporate Indian Christian thought into his Christological views.

<sup>64</sup> Paulos Mar Gregorios, "In Tribute to Bishop Lesslie Newbigin," *International Review of Mission* 79, no. 313 (1990): 94.

<sup>65</sup> Newbigin, *Unfinished Agenda*, 251.

<sup>66</sup> Bob Robinson, "Lesslie Newbigin and the Christian-Hindu Encounter," 301.

Missiologists around the world today who are interested in Newbigin's work have the challenge and opportunity to grapple with Indian theologians' perspectives on the gospel-culture distinction and to address the lack of mutual reception between Newbigin and these theologians. Theological understanding will remain limited, however, if we passively accept Robinson's statement that Newbigin's ambivalence to Indian theology draws "attention to the deep, long-standing, and problematical divide in Christian theology" and then conclude that the "bridging of this deep divide remains elusive."<sup>67</sup> Those who affirm Newbigin's approach to culture in the West could benefit from reflection on the Indian context where culture and religion are more recognizably entwined and Christians express their affinity with Hindu tradition. Whereas Christendom structures have broken down in Europe and North America through Western conceptions of secularism, the insistence on Christian minorities' absolute distinction in India's pluralistic society would lead to Christendom-like enclaves that are isolated from the wider culture. The immersion and engagement in a cultural context that Newbigin's missiological followers advocate in the West is equally important for Christian witness in the non-Western world. This engaged witness is not likely to follow Western patterns, however, when the prevailing cultural environment has non-Christian roots. Newbigin's critics are incorrect to assert that he completely neglects questions of contextualization, but further theological work may be necessary to make Newbigin's gospel-culture distinction relevant to the religio-cultural context of Indian society.<sup>68</sup>

European and North American missiologists who would take the further step of dialogical engagement with Indian and other non-Western theologians must begin with the willingness to be shaped by other theological perspectives. This includes considering how the transformative component of the gospel could be expressed in a way that addresses common human sinfulness without exhibiting an imperialistic impulse toward non-Western cultures and histories. This process of mutual reception may not completely reconcile Newbigin's thought with contemporary Indian theology, but it might enrich Newbigin's theological ideas and lead more Indian Christians to recognize common ground in his view that the gospel speaks within each culture.<sup>69</sup> All parties in this discussion would do well to emulate Newbigin's openness to critiquing his own culture and to follow his advice to "be ready to recognize that we have misrepresented the intention of Jesus because of our own interests."<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 310-311.

<sup>68</sup> See Newbigin's chapter entitled "Contextualization: True and False" in *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*. Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 141-154.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 142, 152.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.



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# Book Reviews

**Robert H. Stein.** *Jesus, the Temple, and the Coming Son of Man: A Commentary on Mark 13.* Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014, pp. 155. \$14.40 (paperback).

Robert H. Stein (Ph.D., Princeton Theological Seminary), senior professor at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and author of the *Mark* volume of the Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, draws due attention to Mark's so-called "Little Apocalypse" in *Jesus, the Temple, and the Coming Son of Man: A Commentary on Mark 13*. His book sets out to accomplish the goal of "understand[ing] what the author of Mark sought to teach his readers by the Jesus traditions that he chose to include in this chapter, his arrangement of these traditions and his editorial work in the recording of this material" (45). By all accounts, he succeeds in achieving this objective.

Stein begins the book with a chapter entitled "Determining Our Goal" in which he purports to lay out the book's purpose of examining the evangelist's meaning for Mark 13. The majority of the chapter, however, is instead devoted to explaining key issues for studies of the historical Jesus. He does not explain why so much attention is devoted to this topic, but it seems that his aim is to illustrate the issues that his book will *not* address.

The brief second chapter discusses some of the larger interpretive issues connected to the interpretation of Mark 13 as a whole. Here, Stein eschews a generic classification of Mark 13 as an "apocalypse," preferring instead to follow Adela Yarbro Collins in naming it an example of "historical narrative." One might have hoped for a clearer discussion of other preliminary matters, especially concerning Stein's dating of the Gospel, but as a succinct introduction to key issues for Mark 13, this chapter accomplishes its purpose. The lengthy list of key questions that he raises for the interpretation of this chapter in Mark demonstrates sensitivity both to the text and to the potential concerns of modern readers (48).

With the exception of the book's final chapter, which includes only the author's translation of Mark 13, the book's remaining chapters are devoted to commentary on 13:1-4; 13:5-23; 13:24-27; 13:28-31; and 13:32-37 respectively. In these chapters, the reader might detect similarity to Stein's discussion of the same in his BECNT commentary on Mark.

Throughout these chapters of commentary, Stein's underlying motivations seem to be somewhat apologetic in nature. For example, in his discussion of 13:2, he worries over the "authenticity of Jesus' prophecy" (56) and seems concerned with establishing issues of the historicity of this prophetic pronouncement. Surprisingly, though, in this

discussion of Jesus' proclamations about the Temple, he never appeals to Donald Juel's helpful work on the Temple charge (14:58), a resource which would have surely bolstered Stein's argument.

Stein is at his best in discussing the apparent problem of Jesus' "failed" prophecy in 13:30. He suggests that previous interpretations have erred in attempting to massage "this generation" (*hē genea hautē*) into indicating something other than its obvious meaning (125). Recognizing the interpretive gymnastics required by this approach, he instead proposes a connection between "all these things" in 13:4 and 13:30 (*tauta panta*). He argues that "all these things" in 13:30 may be understood to indicate the destruction of the Temple, the apparent referent of "all these things" in 13:4. By this reading, Jesus' prophecy is fulfilled with the Temple's destruction in 70 CE. Although his interpretation here also seems to be motivated by the apologetic purpose of absolving Jesus of the charge of false prophecy, his attention to the lexical connection is nonetheless commendable.

Though generally well-written, this book is rather bizarre. For a volume of such a short length, the decision to devote almost 20% of the book to a summary of historical Jesus research and a discussion of criteria of historical authenticity (even wandering off at one point in Pentateuchal source criticism; 34) is truly odd. Furthermore, the decision to begin the volume with this topic, without a formal introduction to the interpretive issues for the Gospel as a whole or for Mark 13 in particular, is even more perplexing. One may also quibble with the placement of the author's interpretive translation of Mark 13 at the conclusion of the book rather than at its beginning, but this is a minor point.

Similarly, the book's intended audience and place in the field is difficult to determine. At times, it appears that Stein is writing for a lay audience with little prior knowledge of either Mark or biblical studies (e.g. his definition of "the Greek translation of the Old Testament called the Septuagint" [88]). At other points, however, his argument rests on particular, if not painstaking, observations on the Greek text (e.g. 65-66, 68-69, 71-72, 78, 82, 125). He contributes to scholarship a close reading of the text of Mark 13 that is to be commended for its attention to detail and methodical execution. However, it is less clear that he is advancing the state of the field for Markan studies. Indeed, his overlooking of some key Markan scholars (e.g. Stephen Ahearne-Kroll, Ernest Best, Donald Juel, David Rhoads, Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, William Telford, Mary Ann Tolbert, among others) and only passing use of others (e.g. Mary Ann Beavis, C. Clifton Black, Eugene Boring, John Painter) is astonishing. The book, then, has a fairly limited audience: educated, non-specialists with interest in the apocalyptic elements of the Gospel of Mark. Given the book's implicit apologetic motivations, it also seems to assume an audience that will be interested in proving the historicity of the Jesus traditions in Mark 13.

Despite these oddities, Stein's close reading of the text demonstrates an attention to detail that specialists and non-specialists alike can admire. Furthermore, the bibliography and individual indices for authors, Markan texts, Scriptures, and other ancient writings make the volume easy to navigate. Thus, despite its limitations, the

book displays an exegetical sensitivity that provides a helpful model for other readings of the Second Gospel.

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**Anselm Min, ed. *The Task of Theology: Leading Theologians on the Most Compelling Questions for Today*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2014, pp. 266. \$37.00 (paperback).**

This book is the fruit of a conference that was organized by Anselm Min and held at Claremont Graduate University in 2012. The conference tackled the question, “What is the most compelling theological issue today?” (ix). Eight theologians attended, and their eight perspectives constitute the majority of the book, while the remainder is comprised of responses to these viewpoints.

To obviate any presumption that the book aims at comprehensiveness, Min notes at the beginning that exhaustive treatment is not forthcoming; rather, the book is oriented around the much more modest ambition of addressing “certain dominant issues and trends in contemporary theology” (ix). With that proviso, the reader is enjoined to hear out each thinker’s case.

The first two essays answer the question by highlighting problems endemic to Christianity itself—specifically, those pertaining to its fragmented identity. John Behr’s take is that theological scholarship needs to overcome its disintegration due to the “presuppositions of modern scholarship” (4). Adapting Irenaeus’s metaphor for Christianity as a complex symphony, Behr says theological orthodoxy should be base its identity not on monophonic consensus for some “original meaning” in Scripture (or historical person, for that matter), but on its united purpose to understand Christ, the Word of God, as seen in the Scriptures through polyphonic, interpretive pluralism in Christian communities (16). Anselm Min also concerns himself with the “crisis of Christian identity” (30); however, his worry is the loss of the possibility for identity formation resulting from, largely, the “globalization of cultural nihilism” (38). Having already eroded Christian identity, cultural nihilism promulgates a “disposition” that “leads to the death of the subject” — it reduces the willing self with commitments, convictions and conscious aims to a mood for immediate satisfaction of arbitrary and often vicious desires (42). In response, Min suggests a revitalization of Christianity must involve grounding its collective identity in the continuity of church traditions and self-understanding—and Min thinks that nothing less than another ecumenical council must be enacted to make this a concrete reality (52-53).

The next two essays concern Christianity’s relation to the world. Robert Schreiter argues that the Roman Catholic Church must form a “theology of the world” in response to pervasive global changes in socio-economic, demographic, ecological, and religious realities (68). In the pluralized world, this “new catholicity” will find its footing in the church’s sensitivity to “signs of the times” filtered through the convergence of two orientations of historic tension: viewing the world as a site of prophecy, where the church openly receives impressions to discern its future actions, and of crisis, where the



world's cry for meaning and restoration is answered with the "message of Jesus Christ and his [united] church" (81-82). Francis Schüssler Fiorenza questions the church and political engagement: can religion relate constructively, and in a spirit of mutual critique or "genuine reciprocal openness," with political liberalism (106, 115)? He thinks it should, and taking pluralism seriously involves rejecting religion's unjustified privatization, welcoming its voice into public discourse, and recognizing its influence on normativity, values, judgment, and morality (113). This, Fiorenza says, will do much for promoting religious involvement as existing for "the public good and the peace of societies today," and so freeing public space from "idols" (like consumerism, the economic market, or secularization) that would constrain and divide religious and nonreligious thought (114, 118).

The third set of essays focus on major problems facing humanity itself. Mark Lewis Taylor, identifies mass incarceration in the United States as one of these problems. To counter the "specters" of American Romanticism and Contractual Liberalism buttressing this oppressive cultural manifestation, Taylor thinks Christian communities can contribute to a positive "countervailing specter," (156) in the form of Critical Movements of Resistance (CMRs), to help empower and mobilize the voices of the oppressed as a "force of networking people" (148). Advocating for "decolonization," Susan Abraham argues that postcolonial theology must actively engage in analyzing theology's history for colonialism's impact and its "continued collusion" with secular and traditionalist forms of neocolonialism threatening structures of liberty and equality (180). This involves reinvigorating a dynamic and relational theology of mission that neither capitulates to a caricatured identity, nor articulates mission as a one-way street of cultural transfer; rather, missions involves a complex history of "mutual conversion and transformation" (175-176). Rosemary Radford Ruether argues that "ecofeminism" provides the robust ethos of an "ecological consciousness... incorporated into feminist theology" to supplant the patriarchal prejudices of traditional Christian theology and worldview (198). This involves a two-sided ethic—"sustainability" pronounces proper limits on consumption and human conduct, and a "preferential option for the poor" (Gustavo Gutiérrez's phrase) redirects humanity's efforts to privilege the oppressed in certain ways and to provide for the well-being of the "whole community of life" (205). Finally, Mark Wallace takes the problem of climate change to be a clarion call for "Christian animism—the biblically inflected conviction that all of creation is infused with and animated by God's presence" (217). Providing the "theological and moral foundations necessary for practical responses" to sustainable life, Christian animism holds that God empowers creation to care for itself and God's self, which the world embodies; as God is a "living, suffering co-participant in the pain of the world," Wallace exhorts us to "reenvision" humanity's relationship to Earth as its "biotic kinspeople" and not as its exploiters (228, 232-233).

A few critical thoughts: first, I join respondents Rhys Kuzmic and James Fredericks in saying that the authors' suggestions regarding the facilitation of unity within Christianity still leave large holes to fill. Kuzmic ventures that substantial theological diversity (e.g., feminist and liberation theologies) yields a fragmented theological reality that Behr will find difficulty reconciling under his framework (26), and Fredericks argues that Schreiter needs to take into account both the diversity within the Global South and

the North's widespread ignorance of the Global South in order to yield an adequate "theology of the world" (89-91). Second, I would like to echo Marlene Block's question to Abraham: what is "distinctly theological" about decolonization (183)? Or Ruether's ecofeminism? Or Wallace's Christian animism? In all cases, it is obvious that theology can be well utilized to accommodate the promotion of these movements; but, what is it that theology contributes to these viewpoints for critical analysis and development of the positions and their hermeneutical presuppositions? What, indeed, is the deeper "task of theology" for these frameworks? Finally, I note that, apart from Taylor, none of the authors articulated what makes a theological issue "compelling." This is detrimental to the conversation's clarity and a loss to these authors who are all eager to garner support for their theological projects. These modest complaints notwithstanding, I commend the authors for producing, on the whole, a well-written and concise introduction to important contemporary issues in theology.

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**Mark Lau Branson and Nicholas Warnes, eds. *Starting Missional Churches: Life with God in the Neighborhood*. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2014, pp. 206. \$14.40 (paperback).**

Mark Lau Branson and Nicholas Warnes have compiled the stories of seven recent church planters who started churches in diverse and difficult settings using unique and unorthodox methods. Through the firsthand accounts of each pastor, they illustrate how the principles of the missional church movement are directly applicable to church planting.

Warnes and Branson begin with an overview of traditional church planting methods and the reasons these methods are inadequate in a post-Christendom era. Chapter two supplies a praxis for the process of church planting by maintaining "constant movement from engagement and action, to study and reflection, and back to further actions" (32). The same chapter also presents a five-step "missional change process" as well as four priorities for church planters. The opening chapters present material which is familiar to those who follow the missional church movement, but the multiple processes and metrics are difficult to keep track of throughout the book. Ultimately, Warnes and Branson advise that church planters take an eclectic approach to developing their own church plants, using the lessons learned from each church planter's story which are relevant to their own situation, and revising church planting models whenever necessary instead of being constrained by institutional traditions.

The real richness of this book lies in the personal accounts of pastors who have planted churches using missional methods and who have grown churches that, as a result, truly understand their place in God's mission. Future church planters will find valuable its emphasis on revising traditional models of church leadership to empower laypeople and new Christians to participate in the mission and work of the church. A common theme among the pastors' accounts is their commitment to allow others to refine and redirect their vision for the new church when necessary. The benefits of this

approach are many: laypeople become more involved in the church, pastors are released from a “hero” mentality, and the church is able to identify and meet needs outside the expertise of the pastor. Branson and Warnes also highlight the importance of discerning and following the work of the Holy Spirit throughout the church planting process. They emphasize the diversity of methods the church planters used to keep their churches focused on ministering to those outside, rather than becoming insular.

*Planting Missional Churches* provides an introduction for those seeking to understand how the principles of the missional church movement translate practically into church planting. This work provides more than feel-good stories of successful church plants: it identifies the ways in which each church applied the principles of the missional church movement in order to faithfully express the gospel in its context. Examining how the founding of each church influenced its trajectory and success in ministry will help church planters begin to think of the ideals on which they should build their own churches.

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**Randall Balmer. *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory: A Journey into the Evangelical Subculture in America*. 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition. New York: Oxford University, 2014, pp. 432. \$24.95 (paperback).**

Randall Balmer achieves the goal he set for his exploration into the subculture of American evangelicalism. In this twenty-fifth anniversary edition of *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory*, Balmer’s journeying to evangelically-oriented locations and his interactions with his evangelical interlocutors span more than twenty-seven years and occur across the United States. He interviews some of the most influential people in the modern history of American evangelicalism, including Donald Thompson (Christian filmmaker who wrote and directed the 1972 premillennial classic *A Thief in the Night*), Jimmy Swaggart (televangelist catapulted to international fame in the 1980s), the members of Jars of Clay (nationally acclaimed Christian music artists), Thomas Kinkade (evangelical painter recognized for the mass production of his works), and Wildredo De Jesús (pastor of the largest Assemblies of God congregation in the United States). The goal of Balmer’s exploration is less explaining and interpreting evangelical subculture (although he does do that) than it is showcasing “patches” that make up the “quilt-work” of American evangelicalism. Therefore, his work is not an exhaustive study of American evangelicalism nor is it a purely academic study.

Many of his evangelical interlocutors exhibit common characteristics. Most of the subjects in his study express some allegiance to conservative political ideology. Many of these evangelicals were expressly anti-liberal, such as Donald Thompson who includes a liberal mainline Protestant minister as a character in *A Thief in the Night* who is left behind after the rapture. Most of Balmer’s subjects also display a literal hermeneutic of the Bible, which often bolsters a premillennial theological framework. Balmer notes at times how this biblical literalism has led many evangelical groups to marginalize women as a result of their reading of the apostle Paul’s letters, has resulted in vigilantly



searching for prophecy fulfillment in current events, and helped to launch the Bible school movement as a response to institutions that were calling tradition interpretive methods into question.

Balmer captures the aspects of American evangelicalism that unite it but does not fail to highlight its various nuances. In particular, he includes three subjects in his study that break significantly from evangelical tendencies: John Perkins (who founded Voice of Calvary Ministries to address the socio-economic needs of Mendenhall, Mississippi), Doug Frank (founder and professor of the alternative education program for Trinity College), and Wilfredo De Jesús (whose ministry includes addressing the broken systems of American politics, such as immigration policies). According to the definition of "evangelical" that Balmer includes in his book, it is conceivable to recognize Perkins and De Jesús as evangelicals despite their emphasis on caring for people using more liberal methods. Contrarily, Frank exhibits little that would suggest he is an evangelical, such as his resistance to the evangelical notion of biblical inerrancy. Despite Frank's own self-identification as an evangelical, Balmer's initial interview with Frank in 1986 suggests that, other than Frank's affiliation with Trinity College, he really has no clearly identifying marks of evangelicalism. It is little wonder why, in the afterward to this twenty-fifth anniversary edition, Frank admits that he no longer identifies as an evangelical.

Balmer is able to portray a significant American subculture in a way that provides his audience with first-hand experience of many evangelical communities, being both appropriately critical and appreciative of the various groups that make up the patchwork of American evangelicalism.

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